THE
MOUNTAIN
GIRL
PAYNE
ERSKINE

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"We will go home – to my home – just like this, together."
FRONTISPIECE. *See Page* 311.

The Mountain Girl

By PAYNE ERSKINE

Author of "When the Gates Lift Up Their Heads."

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS
By J. DUNCAN GLEASON

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THE MOUNTAIN GIRL

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH DAVID THRYNG ARRIVES AT CAREW'S CROSSING

The snow had ceased falling. No wind stirred among the trees that covered the hillsides, and every shrub, every leaf and twig, still bore its feathery, white load. Slowly the train labored upward, with two engines to take it the steepest part of the climb from the valley below. David Thryng gazed out into the quiet, white wilderness and was glad. He hoped Carew's Crossing was not beyond all this, where the ragged edge of civilization, out of which the toiling train had so lately lifted them, would begin again.

He glanced from time to time at the young woman near the door who sat as the bishop had left her, one slight hand grasping the handle of her basket, and with an expression on her face as placid and fraught with mystery as the scene without. The train began to crawl more heavily, and, looking down, Thryng saw that they were crossing a trestle over a deep gorge before skirting the mountain on the other side. Suddenly it occurred to him that he might be carried beyond his station. He stopped the smiling young brakeman who was passing with his flag.

"Let me know when we come to Carew's Crossing, will you?"

"Next stop, suh. Are you foh there, suh?"

"Yes. How soon?"

"Half an houh mo', suh. I'll be back d'rectly and help you off, suh. It's a flag station. We don't stop there in winter 'thout we're called to, suh. Hotel's closed now."

"Hotel? Is there a hotel?" Thryng's voice betokened dismay.

"Yes, suh. It's a right gay little place in summah, ph." He passed on, and Thryng gathered his scattered

effects. Ill and weary, he was glad to find his long journey so nearly at an end.

On either side of the track, as far as eye could see, was a snow-whitened wilderness, seemingly untouched by the hand of man, and he felt as if he had been carried back two hundred years. The only hint that these fastnesses had been invaded by human beings was an occasional rough, deeply red wagon road, winding off among the hills.

The long trestle crossed, the engines labored slowly upward for a time, then, turning a sharp curve, began to descend, tearing along the narrow track with a speed that caused the coaches to rock and sway; and thus they reached Carew's Crossing, dropping down to it like a rushing torrent.

Immediately Thryng found himself deposited in the melting snow some distance from the station platform, and at the same instant, above the noise of the retreating train, he heard a cry: "Oh, suh, help him, help him! It's poor little Hoyle!" The girl whom he had watched, and about whom he had been wondering, flashed by him and caught at the bridle of a fractious colt, that was rearing and plunging near the corner of the station.

"Poor little Hoyle! Help him, suh, help him!" she cried, clinging desperately, while the frantic animal swung her off her feet, close to the flying heels of the kicking mule at his side.

Under the heavy vehicle to which the ill-assorted animals were attached, a child lay unconscious, and David sprang forward, his weakness forgotten in the demand for action. In an instant he had drawn the little chap from his perilous position and, seizing the mule, succeeded in backing him to his place. The cause of its fright having by this time disappeared, the colt became tractable and stood quivering and snorting, as David took the bridle from the girl's hand.

"I'll quiet them now," he said, and she ran to the boy, who had recovered sufficiently to sit up and gaze in a dazed way about him. As she bent over him, murmuring soothing words, he threw his arms around her neck and burst into wild sobbing.

"There, honey, there! No one is hurt. You are no' are you, honey son?"

"I couldn't keep a holt of 'em," he sobbed.

"You shouldn't have done it, honey. You should have let me get home as best I could." Her face was one which could express much, passive as it had been before. "Where was Frale?"

"He took the othah ho'se and lit out. They was aftah him. They —"

"S-sh. There, hush! You can stand now; try, Hoyle. You are a man now."

The little fellow rose, and, perceiving Thryng for the first time, stepped shyly behind his sister. David noticed that he had a deformity which caused him to carry his head twisted stiffly to one side, and also that he had great, beautiful brown eyes, so like those of a hunted fawn as he turned them upon the stranger with wide appeal, that he seemed a veritable creature of the wilderness by which they were surrounded.

Then the girl stepped forward and thanked him with voice and eyes; but he scarcely understood the words she said, as her tones trailed lingeringly over the vowels, and almost eliminated the "r," so lightly was it touched, while her accent fell utterly strange upon his English ear. She looked to the harness with practised eye, and then laid her hand beside Thryng's, on the bridle. It was a strong, shapely hand and wrist.

"I can manage now," she said. "Hoyle, get my basket foh me."

But Thryng suggested that she climb in and take the reins first, although the animals stood quietly enough now; the mule looked even dejected, with hanging head and forward-drooping ears.

The girl spoke gently to the colt, stroking him along the side and murmuring to him in a cooing voice as she mounted to the high seat and gathered up the reins. Then the two beasts settled themselves to their places with a wontedness that assured Thryng they would be perfectly manageable under her hand.

David turned to the child, relieved him of the basket, which was heavy with unusual weight, and would have lifted him up, but Hoyle eluded his grasp, and, scrambling over the wheel with catlike agility, slipped shyly into his place close to the girl's side. Then, with more than child-

like thoughtfulness, the boy looked up into her face and said in a low voice:—

"The gen'l'man's things is ovah yandah by the track, Cass. He cyant tote 'em alone, I reckon. Whar is he goin'?"

Then Thryng remembered himself and his needs. He looked at the line of track curving away up the mountain side in one direction, and in the other lost in a deep cut in the hills; at the steep red banks rising high on each side, arched over by leafy forest growth, with all the interlacing branches and smallest twigs bearing their delicate burden of white, feathery snow. He caught his breath as a sense of the strange, untamed beauty, marvellous and utterly lonely, struck upon him. Beyond the tracks, high up on the mountain slope, he thought he spied, well-nigh hid from sight by the pines, the gambrel roof of a large building — or was it a snow-covered rock?

"Is that a house up there?" he asked, turning to the girl, who sat leaning forward and looking steadily down at him.

"That is the hotel."

"A road must lead to it, then. If I could get up there, I could send down for my things."

"They is no one thar," piped the boy; and Thryng remembered the brakeman's words, and how he had rebelled at the thought of a hotel incongruously set amid this primeval beauty; but now he longed for the comfort of a warm room and tea at a hospitable table. He wished he had accepted the bishop's invitation. It was a predicament to be dropped in this wild spot, without a store, a cabin, or even a thread of blue smoke to be seen as indicating a human habitation, and no soul near save these two children.

The sun was sinking toward the western hilltops, and a chillness began creeping about him as the shadows lengthened across the base of the mountain, leaving only the heights in the glowing light.

"Really, you know, I can't say what I am to do. I'm a stranger here—"

It seemed odd to him at the moment, but her face, framed in the huge sunbonnet, — a delicate flower set in a rough calyx, — suddenly lost all expression. She

did not move nor open her lips. Thryng thought he detected a look of fear in the boy's eyes, as he crept closer to her.

In a flash came to him the realization of the difficulty. His friend had told him of these people, — their occupations, their fear of the world outside and below their fastnesses, and how zealously they guarded their homes and their rights from outside intrusion, yet how hospitable and generous they were to all who could not be considered their hereditary enemies.

He hastened to speak reassuring words, and, bethinking himself that she had called the boy Hoyle, he explained how one Adam Hoyle had sent him.

"The doctor is my friend, you know. He built a cabin somewhere within a day's walk, he told me, of Carew's Crossing, on a mountain top. Maybe you knew him?"

A slight smile crept about the girl's lips, and her eyes brightened. "Yes, suh, we-all know Doctah Hoyle."

"I am to have the cabin — if I can find it — live there as he did, and see what your hills will do for me." He laughed a little as he spoke, deprecating his evident weakness, and, lifting his cap, wiped the cold moisture from his forehead.

She noted his fatigue and hesitated. The boy's questioning eyes were fixed on her face, and she glanced down into them an answering look. Her lips parted, and her eyes glowed as she turned them again on David, but she spoke still in the same passive monotone.

"Oh, yes. My little brothah was named foh him, — Adam Hoyle, — but we only call him Hoyle. It's a right long spell since the Doctah was heah. His cabin is right nigh us, a little highah up. Theah is no place wheah you could stop nighah than ouahs. Hoyle, jump out and help fetch his things ovah. You can put them in the back of the wagon, suh, and ride up with us. I have a sight of room foh them."

The child was out and across the tracks in an instant, seizing a valise much too heavy for him, and Thryng cut his thanks short to go to his relief.

"I kin tote it," said the boy shrilly.

"No, no. I am the biggest, so I'll take the big ones. You bring the bundle with the strap around it — so.

Now we shall get on, shan't we? But you are pretty strong for a little chap;" and the child's face radiated smiles at the praise.

Then David tossed in valise and rug, without which last no Englishman ever goes on a journey, and with much effort they managed to pull the box along and hoist it also into the wagon, the body of which was filled with corn fodder, covered with an old patchwork quilt.

The wagon was of the rudest, clumsiest construction, the heavy box set on axles without springs, but the young physician was thankful for any kind of a conveyance. He had been used to life in the wild, taking things as he found them — bunking in a tent, a board shanty, or out under the open sky; with men brought heterogeneously together, some merely rough woodsmen in their natural environment, others the scum of the cities to whom crime was become first nature, decency second, and others, fleeing from justice and civilized law, hiding ofttimes a fine nature delicately reared. During this time he had seldom seen a woman other than an occasional camp follower of the most degraded sort.

Inured thus, he did not find his ride, embedded with good corn fodder, much of a hardship, even in a springless wagon over mountain roads. Wrapped in his rug, he braced himself against his box, with his face toward the rear of the wagon, and gazed out from under its arching canvas hood at the wild way, as it slowly unrolled behind them, and was pleased that he did not have to spend the night under the lee of the station.

The lingering sunlight made flaming banners of the snow clouds now slowly drifting across the sky above the white world, and touched the highest peaks with rose and gold. The shadows, ever changing, deepened from faintest pink-mauve through heliotrope tints, to the richest violet in the heart of the gorges. Over and through all was the witching mystery of fairy-like, snow-wreathed branches and twigs, interwoven and arching up and up in faint perspective to the heights above, and down, far down, to the depths of the regions below them; and all the time, mingled with the murmur of the voices behind him, and the creaking of the vehicle in which they rode, and the tramp of the animals when they came to a hard roadbed

with rock foundation,—noises which were not loud, but which seemed to be covered and subdued by the soft snow even as it covered everything,—could be heard a light dropping and pattering, as the overladen last year's leaves and twigs dropped their white burden to the ground. Sometimes the great hood of the wagon struck an overhanging bough and sent the snow down in showers as they passed.

Heavily they climbed up, and warily made their descent of rocky steeps, passing through boggy places or splashing in clear streams which issued from springs in the mountain side or fell from some distant height, then climbing again only to wind about and again descend. Often the way was rough with boulders that had never been blasted out,—sometimes steeply shelving where the gorge was deepest and the precipice sheerest. Past all dangers the girl drove with skilful hand, now encouraging her team with her low voice, now restraining them, where their load crowded upon them over slippery, shelving rocks, with strong pulls and sharp command. David marvelled at her serenity under the strain, and at her courage and deftness. With the calmness of the boy nestling at her side, he resigned himself to the sweet witchery of the time and place. Glancing up at the high seat behind him, he saw the child's feet dangling, and knew they must be cold.

"Why can't your little brother sit back here with me?" he said; "I'll cover him with my rug, and we'll keep each other warm."

He saw the small hunched back stiffen, and try to appear big and manly, but she checked the team at a level dip in the road.

"Yes, sonny, get ovah theah with the gentleman. It'll be some coldah now the sun's gone." But the little man was shyly reluctant to move. "Come, honey. Sistah'd a heap rathah you would."

Then David reached up and gently lifted the atom of manhood, of pride, sensitiveness, and affection, over where he caused him to snuggle down in the fodder close to his side.

For a while the child sat stiffly aloof, but gradually his little form relaxed, and his head drooped sideways in the hollow of the stranger's shoulder, held comfortably by

Thryng's kindly encircling arm. Soon, with his small feet wrapped in the warm, soft rug, he slept soundly and sweetly, rocked, albeit rather roughly, in the jolting wagon.

Thryng also dreamed, but not in sleep. His mind was stirred to unusual depths by his strange surroundings — the silence, the mystery, the beauty of the night, and the suggestions of grandeur and power dimly revealed by the moonlight which bathed the world in a flood of glory.

He was uplifted and drawn out of himself, and at the same time he was thrown back to review his life and to see his most inward self, and to marvel and question the wherefore of it all. Why was he here, away from the active, practical affairs which interest other men? Was he a creature of ideals only, or was he also a practical man, taking the wisest means of reaching and achieving results most worth while? He saw himself in his childhood — in his youth — in his young manhood — even to the present moment, jogging slowly along in a far country, rough and wild, utterly dependent on the courtesy of a slight girl, who held, for the moment, his life in her hands; for often, as he gazed into the void of darkness over narrow ledges, he knew that only the skill of those two small hands kept them from sliding into eternity: yet there was about her such an air of wontedness to the situation that he was stirred by no sense of anxiety for himself or for her.

He took out his pipe and smoked, still dreaming, comparing, and questioning. Of ancient family, yet the younger son of three generations of younger sons, all probability of great inheritance or title so far removed from him, it behooved that he build for himself — what? Fortune, name, everything. Character? Ah, that was his heritage, all the heritage the laws of England allowed him, and that not by right of English law, but because, fixed in the immutable, eternal Will, some laws there are beyond the power of man to supersede. With an involuntary stiffening of his body, he disturbed for an instant the slumbering child, and quite as involuntarily he drew him closer and soothed him back to forgetfulness; and they both dreamed on, the child in his sleep, and the man in his wide wakefulness and intense searching.

His uncle, it is true, would have boosted him far toward creating both name and fame for himself, in either army

or navy, but he would none of it. There was his older brother to be advanced, and the younger son of this same uncle to be placed in life, or married to wealth. This also he might have done; well married he might have been ere now, and could be still, for she was waiting — only — an ideal stood in his way. Whom he would marry he would love. Not merely respect or like, — not even both, — but love he must; and in order to hold to this ideal he must fly the country, or remain to be unduly urged to his own discomfiture and possibly to their mutual undoing.

As for the alternatives, the army or the navy, again his ideals had formed for him impassable bars. He would found his career on the saving rather than the taking of life. Perhaps he might yet follow in the wake of armies to mend bodies they have torn and cut and maimed, and heal diseases they have engendered — yes — perhaps — the ideals loomed big. But what had he done? Fled his country and deftly avoided the most heart-satisfying of human delights — children to call him father, and wife to make him a home; peace and wealth; thrust aside the helping hand to power and a career considered most worthy of a strong and resourceful man, and thrown personal ambition to the winds. Why? Because of his ideals — preferring to mend rather than to mar his neighbor.

Surely he was right — and yet — and yet. What had he accomplished? Taken the making of his life into his own hands and lost — all — if health were really gone. One thing remained to him — the last rag and remnant of his cherished ideals — to live long enough to triumph over his own disease and take up work again. Why should he succumb? Was it fate? Was there the guidance of a higher will? Might he reach out and partake of the Divine power? But one thing he knew; but one thing could he do. As the glory of white light around him served to reveal a few feet only of the way, even as the density beyond seemed impenetrable, still it was but seeming. There was a beyond — vast — mysterious — which he must search out, slowly, painfully, if need be, seeing a little way only, but seeing that little clearly, revealed by the white light of spirit. His own or God's? Into the infinite he must search — search — and at last surely find.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH DAVID THRYNG EXPERIENCES THE HOSPITALITY OF THE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE

SUDDENLY the jolting ceased. The deep stillness of the night seemed only intensified by the low panting of the animals and the soft dropping of the wet snow from the trees.

"What is it?" said Thryng, peering from under the canvas cover. "Anything the matter?"

The beasts stood with low-swung heads, the vapor rising white from their warm bodies, wet with the melting snow. His question fell unheard, and the girl who was climbing down over the front wheel began to unhitch the team in silence. He rolled the sleeping child in his rug and leaped out.

"Let me help you. What is the trouble? Oh, are you at home?"

"I can do this, suh. I have done it a heap of times. Don't go nigh Pete, suh. He's mighty quick, and he's mean." The beast laid back his ears viciously as David approached.

"You ought not go near him yourself," he said, taking a firm grip of the bridle.

"Oh, he's safe enough with me — or Frale. Hold him tight, suh, now you have him, till I get round there. Keep his head towa'ds you. He certainly is mean."

The colt walked off to a low stack of corn fodder, as she turned him loose with a light slap on the flank; and the mule, impatient, stamping and sidling about, stretched forth his nose and let out his raucous and hideous cry. While he was thus occupied, the girl slipped off his harness and, taking the bridle, led the beast away to a small railed enclosure on the far side of the stack; and David stood alone in the snow and looked about him.

He saw a low, rambling house, which, although one structure, appeared to be a series of houses, built of logs plastered with clay in the chinks. It stood in a tangle of wild

growth, on what seemed to be a wide ledge jutting out from the side of the mountain, which loomed dark and high behind it. An incessant, rushing sound pervaded the place, as it were a part of the silence or a breathing of the mountain itself. Was it wind among the trees, or the rushing of water? No wind stirred now, and yet the sound never ceased. It must be a torrent swollen by the melting snow.

He saw the girl moving in and out among the shadows, about the open log stable, like a wraith. The braying of the mule had disturbed the occupants of the house, for a candle was placed in a window, and its little ray streamed forth and was swallowed up in the moonlight and black shades. The child, awakened by the horrible noise of the beast, rustled in the corn fodder where Thryng had left him. Dazed and wondering, he peered out at the young man for some moments, too shy to descend until his sister should return. Now she came, and he scrambled down and stood close to her side, looking up weirdly, his twisted little form shivering and quaking.

"Run in, Hoyle," she said, looking kindly down upon him. "Tell mothah we're all right, son."

A woman came to the door holding a candle, which she shaded with a gnarled and bony hand.

"That you, Cass?" she quavered. "Who aire ye talkin' to?"

"Yes, Aunt Sally, we'll be there directly. Don't let mothah get cold." She turned again to David. "I reckon you'll have to stop with us to-night. It's a right smart way to the cabin, and it'll be cold, and nothing to eat. We'll bring in your things now, and in the morning we can tote them up to your place with the mule, and Hoyle can go with you to show you the way."

She turned toward the wagon as if all were settled, and Thryng could not be effusive in the face of her direct and conclusive manner; but he took the basket from her hand.

"Let me — no, no — I will bring in everything. Thank you very much. I can do it quite easily, taking one at a time." Then she left him, but at the door she met him and helped to lift his heavy belongings into the house.

The room he entered was warm and brightly lighted by a pile of blazing logs in the great chimneyplace. He walked toward it and stretched his hands to the fire — a generous fire — the mountain home's luxury.

Something was cooking in the ashes on the hearth which sent up a savory odor most pleasant and appealing to the hungry man. The meagre boy stood near, also warming his little body, on which his coarse garments hung limply. He kept his great eyes fixed on David's face in a manner disconcerting, even in a child, had Thryng given his attention to it, but at the moment he was interested in other things. Dropped thus suddenly into this utterly alien environment, he was observing the girl and the old woman as intently, though less openly, as the boy was watching him.

Presently he felt himself uncannily the object of a scrutiny far different from the child's wide-eyed gaze, and glancing over his shoulder toward the corner from which the sensation seemed to emanate, he saw in the depths of an old four-posted bed, set in their hollow sockets and roofed over by projecting light eyebrows, a pair of keen, glittering eyes.

"Yas, you see me now, do ye?" said a high, thin voice in toothless speech. "Who be ye?"

His physician's feeling instantly alert, he stepped to the bedside and bent over the wasted form, which seemed hardly to raise the clothing from its level smoothness, as if she had lain motionless since some careful hand had arranged it.

"No, ye don't know me, I reckon. 'Tain't likely. Who be ye?" she iterated, still looking unflinchingly in his eyes.

"Hit's a gentleman who knows Doctah Hoyle, mothah. He sent him. Don't fret you'se'f," said the girl soothingly.

"I'm not one of the frettin' kind," retorted the mother, never taking her eyes from his face, and again speaking in a weak monotone. "Who be ye?"

"My name is David Thryng, and I am a doctor," he said quietly.

"Where be ye from?"

"I came from Canada, the country where Doctor Hoyle lives."

"I reckon so. He used to tell 'at his home was thar."

A pallid hand was reached slowly out to him. "I'm right glad to see ye. Take a cheer and set. Bring a cheer, Sally."

But the girl had already placed him a chair, which he drew close to the bedside. He took the feeble old hand and slipped his fingers along to rest lightly on the wrist.

"You needn't stan' watchin' me, Cass. You 'n' Sally set suthin' fer th' doctah to eat. I reckon ye're all about gone fer hunger."

"Yes, mothah, right soon. Fry a little pork to go with the pone, Aunt Sally. Is any coffee left in the pot?"

"I done put in a leetle mo' when I heered the mule hollah. I knowed ye'd want it. Might throw in a mite mo' now th' gentleman's come."

The two women resumed their preparations for supper, the boy continued to stand and gaze, and the high voice of the frail occupant of the bed began again to talk and question.

"When did you come down f'om that thar country whar Doctah Hoyle lives at?" she said, in her monotonous wail.

"Four days ago. I travelled slowly, for I have been ill myself."

"Hit's right quare now; 'pears like ef I was a doctah I wouldn't 'low myself fer to get sick. An' you seed Doctah Hoyle fo' days back!"

"No, he has gone to England on a visit. I saw his wife, though, and his daughter. She is a young lady — is to be married soon."

"They do grow up — the leetle ones. Hit don't seem mo'n yestahday 'at Cass was like leetle Hoyle yandah, an' hit don't seem that since Doctah Hoyle was here an' leetle Hoyle came. We named him fer th' doctah. Waal, I reckon ef th' doctah was here now 'at he could he'p me some. Maybe ef he'd 'a' stayed here I nevah would 'a' got down whar I be now. He was a right good doctah, bettah'n a yarb doctah — most — I reckon so."

David smiled. "I think so myself," he said. "Are there many herb doctors here about?"

"Not rightly doctahs, so to speak, but they is some 'at knows a heap about yarbs."

"Good. Perhaps they can teach me something."

The old face was feebly lifted a bit from the pillow, and the dark eyes grew suddenly sharp in their scrutiny.

"Who be ye, anyhow? What aire ye here fer? Sech as you knows a heap a'ready 'thout makin' out to larn o' we-uns."

David saw his mistake and hastened to allay the suspicion which gleamed out at him almost malignantly.

"I am just what I said, a doctor like Adam Hoyle, only that I don't know as much as he — not yet. The wisest man in the world can learn more if he watches out to do so. Your herb doctors might be able to teach me a good many things."

"I 'spect ye're right thar, on'y a heap o' folks thinks they knows it all fust."

There was a pause, and Thryng leaned back in his stiff, splint-bottomed chair and glanced around him. He saw that the girl, although moving about setting to rights and brushing here and there with an unique, home-made broom, was at the same time intently listening.

Presently the old woman spoke again, her threadlike voice penetrating far.

"What do you 'low to do here in ouah mountains? They hain't no settlement nighabouts here, an' them what's sick hain't no money to pay doctahs with. I reckon they'll hev to stay sick fer all o' you-uns."

David looked into her eyes a moment quietly; then he smiled. The way to her heart he saw was through the magic of one name.

"What did Doctor Hoyle do when he was down here?"

"Him? They hain't no one livin' like he was."

Then David laughed outright, a gay, contagious laugh, and after an instant she laughed also.

"I agree with you," he said. "But you see, I am a countryman of his, and he sent me here — he knows me well — and I mean to do as he did, if — I can."

He drew in a deep breath of utter weariness, and leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands, and gazed into the blazing fire. The memories which had taken possession of his soul during the long ride seemed to envelop him so that in a moment the present was swept away into oblivion and his spirit was, as it were, suddenly withdrawn from the body and projected into

the past. He had been unable to touch any of the greasy cold stuff which had been offered him during the latter part of his journey, and the heat brought a drowsiness on him and a faintness from lack of food.

"Cass — Cassandry! Look to him," called the mother shrilly, but the girl had already noticed his strange abstraction, and the small Adam Hoyle had drawn back, in awe, to his mother.

"Get some whiskey, Sally," said the girl, and David roused himself to see her bending over him.

"I must have gone off in a doze," he said weakly. "The long ride and then this warmth — " Seeing the anxious faces around him, he laughed again. "It's nothing, I assure you, only the comfort and the smell of something good to eat;" he sniffed a little. "What is it?" he asked.

Old Sally was tossing and shaking the frying salt pork in the skillet at the fireplace, and the odor aggravated his already too keen appetite.

"Ye was more'n sleepy, I reckon," shrilled the woman from the bed. "Hain't that pone done, Sally? No, 'tain't liquor he needs; hit's suthin' to eat."

Then the girl hastened her slow, gliding movements, drew splint chairs to a table of rough pine that stood against the side of the room, and, stooping between him and the fire, pulled something from among the hot ashes. The fire made the only light in the room, and David never forgot the supple grace of her as she bent thus silhouetted — the perfect line of chin and throat black against the blaze, contrasted with the weird, witchlike old woman with roughly knotted hair, who still squatted in the heat, and shook the skillet of frying pork.

"There, now hit's done, I reckon," said old Sally, slowly rising and straightening her bent back; and the woman from the bed called her orders.

"Not that cup," she cried, as Sally began pouring black coffee into a cracked white cup. "Git th' chany one. I hid hit usin' hit th' cornder 'hind that tin can, to keep 'em from usin' it every day. I had a hull set o' that when I married Farwell. Give hit here." She took the precious relic in her worn hands and peered into it, then wiped it out with the corner of the sheet which covered her.

This Thryng did not see. He was watching the girl, as she broke open the hot, fragrant corn-bread and placed it beside his plate.

"Come," she said. "You sure must be right hungry. Sit here and eat." David felt like one drunken with weariness when he rose, and caught at the edge of the table to steady himself.

"Aren't you hungry, too?" he asked, "and Hoyle, here? Sit beside me; we're going to have a feast, little chap."

The girl placed an earthen crock on the table and took from it honey in the broken comb, rich and dark.

"Have a little of this with your pone. It's right good," she said.

"Frale, he found a bee tree," piped the child suddenly, gaining confidence as he saw the stranger engaged in the very normal act of eating with the relish of an ordinary man. He edged forward and sat himself gingerly on the outer corner of the next chair, and accepted a huge piece of the pone from David's hand. His sister gave him honey, and Sally dropped pieces of the sizzling hot pork on their plates, from the skillet.

David sipped his coffee from the flowered "chany cup" contentedly. Served without milk or sugar, it was strong, hot, and reviving. The girl shyly offered more of the corn-bread as she saw it rapidly disappearing, pleased to see him eat so eagerly, yet abashed at having nothing else to offer.

"I'm sorry we can give you only such as this. We don't live like you do in the no'th. Have a little more of the honey."

"Ah, but this is fine. Good, hey, little chap? You are doing a very beneficent thing, do you know, saving a man's life?" He glanced up at her flushed face and she smiled deprecatingly. He fancied her smiles were rare, for

"But it is quite true. Where would I be now but for you and Hoyle here? Lying under the ledge by the station coughing my life away, — and all my own fault, too. I should have accepted the bishop's invitation."

"You helped me when the colt was on his ear when she spoke. voice, low and monotonous, fell musically on David's said." Her soft

"Naturally — but how about that, anyway? It's a

"Casabianca, was it?" said Thryng, smiling. Page 17.

wonder you weren't killed. How came a youngster like you there alone with those beasts?" Thryng had an abrupt manner of springing a question which startled the child, and he edged away, furtively watching his sister.

"Did you hitch that kicking brute alone and drive all that distance?"

"Aunt Sally, she he'ped me to tie up; she gave him co'n whilst I th'owed on the strops, an' when he's oncet tied up, he goes all right." The atom grinned. "Hit's his way. He's mean, but he nevah works both ends to oncet."

"Good thing to know; but you're a hero, do you understand that?" The child continued to edge away, and David reached out and drew him to his side. Holding him by his two sharp little elbows, he gave him a playful shake. "I say, do you know what a hero is?"

The startled boy stopped grinning and looked wildly to his sister, but receiving only a smile of reassurance from her, he lifted his great eyes to Thryng's face, then slowly the little form relaxed, and he was drawn with the doctor's encircling arm.

"I don't reckon," was all his reply, which ambiguous remark caused David, in his turn, to look to the sister for elucidation. She held a long, lighted candle in her hand, and paused to look back as she was leaving the room.

"Yes, you do, honey son. You remembah the boy with the quare long name sistah told you about, who stood there when the ship was all afiah and wouldn't leave because his fathah had told him to bide? He was a hero." But Hoyle was too shy to respond, and David could feel his little heart thumping against his arm as he held him.

"Tell the gentleman, Hoyle. He don't bite, I reckon," called the mother from her corner.

"His name begun like yourn, Cass, but I cyan't remembah the hull of it."

"Casabianca, was it?" said Thryng, smiling.

"I reckon. Did you-uns know him?"

"When I was a small chap like you, I used to read about him." Then the atom yielded entirely, and leaned comfortably against David, and his sister left them, carrying the candle with her.

Old Sally threw another log on the fire, and the flames leaped up the cavernous chimney, lighting the room with

dramatic splendor. Thryng took note of its unique furnishing. In the corner opposite the one where the mother lay was another immense four-poster bed, and before it hung a coarse homespun curtain, half concealing it. At its foot was a huge box of dark wood, well-made and strong, with a padlock. This and the beds seemed to belong to another time and place, in contrast to the other articles, which were evidently mountain made, rude in construction and hewn out by hand, the chairs unstained and unpolished, and seated with splints.

The walls were the roughly dressed logs of which the house was built, the chinks plastered with deep red-brown clay. Depending from nails driven in the logs were festoons of dried apple and strips of dried pumpkin, and hanging by their braided husks were bunches of Indian corn, not yellow like that of the north, but white or purple.

There were bags also, containing Thryng knew not what, although he was to learn later, when his own larder came to be eked out by sundry gifts of dried fruit and sweet corn, together with the staple of beans and peas from the widow's store.

Beside the window of small panes was a shelf, on which were a few worn books, and beneath hung an almanac; at the foot of the mother's bed stood a small spinning-wheel, with the wool still hanging to the spindle. David wondered how long since it had been used. The scrupulous cleanliness of the place satisfied his fastidious nature, and gave him a sense of comfort in the homely interior. He liked the look of the bed in the corner, made up high and round, and covered with marvellous patchwork.

As he sat thus, noting all his surroundings, Hoyle still nestled at his side, leaning his elbows on the doctor's knees, his chin in his hands, and his soft eyes fixed steadily on the doctor's face. Thus they advanced rapidly toward an amicable acquaintance, each questioning and being questioned.

"What is a 'bee tree'?" said David. "You said somebody found one."

"Hit's a big holler tree, an' hit's plumb full o' bees an' honey. Frale, he found this'n."

"Tell me about it. Where was it?"

"Hit war up yandah, highah up th' mountain. They is

a hole thar what wil' cats live in, Wil' Cat Hole. Frale, he war a hunt'n' fer a cat. Some men thar at th' hotel, they war plumb mad to hunt a wil' cat with th' dogs, an' Frale, he 'lowed to git th' cat fer 'em."

"And when was that?"

"Las' summah, when th' hotel war open. They war a heap o' men at th' hotel."

"And now about the bee tree?"

"Frale, he nevah let on like he know'd thar war a bee tree, an' then this fall he took me with him, an' we made a big fire, an' then we cut down th' tree, an' we stayed thar th' hull day, too, an' eat thar an' had ros'n ears by th' fire, too."

"I say, you know. There seem to be a lot of things you will have to enlighten me about. After you get through with the bee tree you must tell me what 'ros'n ears' are. And then what did you do?"

"Thar war a heap o' honey. That tree, hit war nigh-about plumb full o' honey, and th' bees war that mad you couldn't let 'em come nigh ye 'thout they'd sting you. They stung me, an' I nevah hollered. Frale, he 'lowed ef you hollered, you wa'n't good fer nothin', goin' bee hunt'n'."

"Is Frale your brother?"

"Yas. He c'n do a heap o' things, Frale can. They war a heap o' honey in that thar tree, 'bout a bar'l full, er more'n that. We hev a hull tub o' honey out thar in th' loom shed yet, an' maw done sont all th' rest to th' neighbors, 'cause maw said they wa'n't no use in humans bein' fool hogs like th' bees war, a-keepin' more'n they could eat jes' fer therselves."

"Yas," called the mother from her corner, where she had been admiringly listening; "they is a heap like that-a-way, but hit ain't our way here in th' mountains. Let th' doctah tell you suthin' now, Hoyle, — ye mount larn a heap if ye'd hark to him right smart, 'thout talkin' th' hull time youse'f."

"I has to tell him 'bouts th' ros'n ears — he said so. Thar they be." He pointed to a bunch of Indian corn. "You wrop 'em up in ther shucks, whilst ther green an' sof', and kiver 'em up in th' ashes whar hit's right hot, and then when ther rosted, eat 'em so. Now, what do you know?"

"Why, he knows a heap, son. Don't ax that-a-way."

"In my country, away across the ocean —" began David.

"Tell 'bout th' ocean, how hit look."

"In my country we don't have Indian corn nor bee trees, nor wild cat holes, but we have the ocean all around us, and we see the ships and —"

"Like that thar one whar th' boy stood whilst hit war on fire?"

"Something like, yes." Then he told about the sea and the ships and the great fishes, and was interrupted with the query: —

"Reckon you done seed that thar fish what swallered the man in th' Bible an' then th'ow'd him up agin?"

"Why no, son, you know that thar fish war dade long 'fore we-uns war born. You mustn't ax fool questions, honey."

Old Sally sat crouched by the hearth intently listening and asking as naïve questions as the child, whose pallid face grew pink and animated, and whose eyes grew larger as he strove to see with inward vision the things Thryng described. It was a happy evening for little Hoyle. Leaning confidingly against David, he sighed with repletion of joy. He was not eager for his sister to return — not he. He could lean forever against this wonderful man and listen to his tales. But the doctor's weariness was growing heavier, and he bethought himself that the girl had not eaten with them, and feared she was taking trouble to prepare quarters for him, when if she only knew how gladly he would bunk down anywhere, — only to sleep while this blessed and delicious drowsiness was overpowering him.

"Where is your sister, Hoyle? Don't you reckon it's time you and I were abed?" he asked, adopting the child's vernacular.

"She's makin' yer bed ready in th' loom shed, likely," said the mother, ever alert. With her pale, prematurely wrinkled face and uncannily bright and watchful eyes, she seemed the controlling, all-pervading spirit of the place. "Run, child, an' see what's keepin' her so long."

"Hit's dark out thar," said the boy, stirring himself slowly.

"Run, honey, you hain't afeared, kin drive a team all by you'se'f. Dark hain't nothin'; I ben all ovah these heah mountains when thar wa'n't one star o' light. Maybe you kin he'p her."

At that moment she entered, holding the candle high to light her way through what seemed to be a dark passage, her still, sweet face a bit flushed and stray taches of white cotton down clinging to her blue homespun dress. "The doctah's mos' dade fer sleep, Cass."

"I am right sorry to keep you so long, but we are obleeged —"

She lifted troubled eyes to his face, as Thryng interrupted her.

"Ah, no, no! I really beg your pardon — for coming in on you this way — it was not right, you know. It was a — a — predicament, wasn't it? It certainly wasn't right to put you about so; if — you will just let me go anywhere, only to sleep, I shall be greatly obliged. I'm making you a lot of trouble, and I'm so sorry."

His profusion of manner, of which he was entirely unaware, embarrassed her; although not shy like her brother, she had never encountered any one who spoke with such rapid abruptness, and his swift, penetrating glance and pleasant ease of the world abashed her. For an instant she stood perfectly still before him, slowly comprehending his thought, then hastened with her inherited, inborn ladyhood to relieve him from any sense that his sudden descent upon their privacy was an intrusion.

Her mind moved along direct lines from thought to expression — from impulse to action. She knew no conventional tricks of words or phrases for covering an awkward situation, and her only way of avoiding a self-betrayal was by silence and a masklike impassivity. During this moment of stillness while she waited to regain her poise, he, quick and intuitive as a woman, took in the situation, yet he failed to comprehend the character before him.

To one accustomed to the conventional, perfect simplicity seems to conceal something held back. It is hard to believe that all is being revealed, hence her slower thought, in reality, comprehended him the more truly. What he supposed to be pride and shame over their meagre accommodations was, in reality, genuine concern for his

comfort, and embarrassment before his ease and ready phrases. As in a swift breeze her thoughts were caught up and borne away upon them, but after a moment they would sweep back to her — a flock of innocent, startled doves.

Still holding her candle aloft, she raised her eyes to his and smiled. "We-uns are right glad you came. If you can be comfortable where we are obliged to put you to sleep, you must bide awhile." She did not say "obleeged" this time. He had not pronounced it so, and he must know.

"That is so good of you. And now you are very tired yourself and have eaten nothing. You must have your own supper. Hoyle can look after me." He took the candle from her and gave it to the boy, then turned his own chair back to the table and looked inquiringly at Sally squatted before the fire. "Not another thing shall you do for me until you are waited on. Take my place here."

David's manner seemed like a command to her, and she slid into the chair with a weary, drooping movement. Hoyle stood holding the candle, his wry neck twisting his head to one side, a smile on his face, eying them sharply. He turned a questioning look to his sister, as he stiffened himself to his newly acquired importance as host.

Thryng walked over to the bedside. "In the morning, when we are all rested, I'll see what can be done for you," he said, taking the proffered old hand in his. "I am not Dr. Hoyle, but he has taught me a little. I studied and practised with him, you know."

"Hev ye? Then ye must know a heap. Hit's right like th' Lord sont ye. You see suthin' 'peared like to give way whilst I war a-cuttin' light 'ud th' othah day, an' I went all er a heap 'crost a log, an' I reckon hit hurt me some. I hain't ben able to move a foot sence, an' I lay out thar nigh on to a hull day, whilst Hoyle here run clar down to Sally's place to git her. He couldn't lif' me hisse'f, he's that weak; he tried to haul me in, but when I hollered, — sufferin' so I war jes' 'bleeged to holler, — he kivered me up whar I lay and lit out fer Sally, an' she an' her man they got me up here, an' here I ben ever since. I reckon I never will leave this bed ontwell I'm cyarried out in a box."

"Oh, no, not that! You're too much alive for that. We'll see about it to-morrow. Good night."

"Hoyle may show you the way," said the girl, rising. "Your bed is in the loom shed. I'm right sorry it's so cold. I put blankets there, and you can use all you like of them. I would have given you Frale's place up garret — only — he might come in any time, and —"

"Naw, he won't. He's too skeered 'at —" Hoyle's interruption stopped abruptly, checked by a glance of his sister's eye.

"I hope you'll sleep well —"

"Sleep? I shall sleep like a log. I feel as if I could sleep for a week. It's awfully good of you. I hope we haven't eaten all the supper, Hoyle and I. Come, little chap. Good night." He took up his valise and followed the boy, leaving her standing by the uncleared table, gazing after him."

"Now you eat, Cassandry. You are nigh about perished you are that tired," said her mother.

Then old Sally brought more pork and hot pone from the ashes, and they sat down together, eating and sipping their black coffee in silence. Presently Hoyle returned and began removing his clumsy shoes, by the fire.

"Did he ax ye a heap o' questions, Hoyle?" queried the old woman sharply.

"Naw. Did'n' ax noth'n'."

"Waal, look out 'at you don't let on nothin' ef he does. Talkin' may hurt, an' hit may not."

"He hain't no government man, maw."

"Hit's all right, I reckon, but them 'at larns young to hold ther tongues saves a heap o' trouble fer therselves."

After they had eaten, old Sally gathered the few dishes together and placed all the splint-bottomed chairs back against the sides of the room, and, only half disrobing, crawled into the far side of the bed opposite to the mother's, behind the homespun curtain.

"To-morrow I reckon I kin go home to my old man, now you've come, Cass."

"Yes," said the girl in a low voice, "you have been right kind to we-all, Aunt Sally."

Then she bent over her mother, ministering to her few wants; lifting her forward, she shook up the pillow, and

gently laid her back upon it, and lightly kissed her cheek. The child had quickly dropped to sleep, curled up like a ball in the farther side of his mother's bed, undisturbed by the low murmur of conversation. Cassandra drew her chair close to the fire and sat long gazing into the burning logs that were fast crumbling to a heap of glowing embers. She uncoiled her heavy bronze hair and combed it slowly out, until it fell a rippling mass to the floor, as she sat. It shone in the firelight as if it had drawn its tint from the fire itself, and the cold night had so filled it with electricity that it flew out and followed the comb, as if each hair were alive, and made a moving aureola of warm red amber about her drooping figure in the midst of the sombre shadows of the room. Her face grew sad and her hands moved listlessly, and at last she slipped from her chair to her knees and wept softly and prayed, her lips forming the words soundlessly. Once her mother awoke, lifted her head slightly from her pillow and gazed an instant at her, then slowly subsided, and again slept.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH AUNT SALLY TAKES HER DEPARTURE AND MEETS FRALE

THE loom shed was one of the log cabins connected with the main building by a roofed passage, which Thryng had noticed the evening before as being an odd fashion of house architecture, giving the appearance of a small flock of cabins all nestling under the wings of the old building in the centre.

The shed was dark, having but one small window with glass panes near the loom, the other and larger opening being tightly closed by a wooden shutter. David slept late, and awoke at last to find himself thousands of miles away from his dreams in this unique room, all in the deepest shadow, except for the one warm bar of sunlight which fell across his face. He drowsed off again, and his mind began piecing together fragments and scenes from the previous day and evening, and immediately he was surrounded by mystery, moonlit, fairylike, and white, a little crooked being at his side looking up at him like some gnome creature of the hills, revealed as a part of the enchantment. Then slowly resolving and melting away after the manner of dreams, the wide spaces of the mystery drew closer and warmer, and a great centre of blazing logs threw grotesque, dancing lights among them, and an old face peered out with bright, keen eyes, now seen, now lost in the fitful shadows, now pale and appealing or cautiously withdrawn, but always watching — watching while the little crooked being came and watched also. Then between him and the blazing light came a dark figure silhouetted blackly against it, moving, stooping, rising, going and coming — a sweet girl's head with heavily coiled hair through which the firelight played with flashes of its own color, and a delicate profile cut in pure, clean lines melting into throat and gently rounded breast; like a spirit, now here, now gone, again near and bending over him, — a ministering spirit bringing him food, — until

gradually this half wake, dreaming reminiscence concentrated upon her, and again he saw her standing holding the candle high and looking up at him, — a wondering, questioning spirit, — then drooping wearily into the chair by the uncleared table, and again waiting with almost a smile on her parted lips as he said "good night." Good night? Ah, yes. It was morning.

Again he heard the continuous rushing noise to which he had listened in the white mystery, that had soothed him to slumber the night before, rising and falling — never ceasing. He roused himself with sudden energy and bounded from his couch. He would go out and investigate. His sleep had been sound, and he felt a rejuvenation he had not experienced in many months. When he threw open the shutter of the large unglazed window space and looked out on his strange surroundings, he found himself in a new world, sparkling, fresh, clear, shining with sunlight and glistening with wetness, as though the whole earth had been newly washed and varnished. The sunshine streamed in and warmed him, and the air, filled with winelike fragrance, stirred his blood and set his pulses leaping.

He had been too exhausted the previous evening to do more than fall into the bed which had been provided him and sleep his long, uninterrupted sleep. Now he saw why they had called this part of the home the loom shed, for between the two windows stood a cloth loom left just as it had been used, the warp like a tightly stretched veil of white threads, and the web of cloth begun.

In one corner were a few bundles of cotton, one of which had been torn open and the contents placed in a thick layer over the long bench on which he had slept, and covered with a blue and white homespun counterpane. The head had been built high with it, and sheets spread over all. He noticed the blankets which had covered him, and saw that they were evidently of home manufacture, and that the white spread which covered them was also of coarse, clean homespun, ornamented in squares with rude, primitive needlework. He marvelled at the industry here represented.

As for his toilet, the preparation had been most simple. A shelf placed on pegs driven between the logs supported

a piece of looking-glass; a splint chair set against the wall served as wash-stand and towel-rack — the homespun cotton towels neatly folded and hung over the back; a wooden pail at one side was filled with clear water, over which hung a dipper of gourd; a white porcelain basin was placed on the chair, over which a clean towel had been spread, and to complete all, a square cut from the end of a bar of yellow soap lay beside the basin.

David smiled as he bent himself to the refreshing task of bathing in water so cold as to be really icy. Indeed, ice had formed over still pools without during the night, although now fast disappearing under the glowing morning sun. Above his head, laid upon cross-beams, were bundles of wool uncarded, and carding-boards hung from nails in the logs. In one corner was a rudely constructed reel, and from the loom dangled the idle shuttle filled with fine blue yarn of wool. Thryng thought of the worn old hands which had so often thrown it, and thinking of them he hastened his toilet that he might go in and do what he could to help the patient. It was small enough return for the kindness shown him. He feared to offer money for his lodgment, at least until he could find a way.

At last, full of new vigor and very hungry, he issued from his sleeping-room, sadly in need of a shave, but biding his time, satisfied if only breakfast might be forthcoming. He had no need to knock, for the house door stood open, flooding the place with sunlight and frosty air. The huge pile of logs was blazing on the hearth as if it had never ceased since the night before, and the flames leaped hot and red up the great chimney.

Old Sally no longer presided at the cookery. With a large cup of black coffee before her, she now sat at the table eating corn-bread and bacon. A drooping black sunbonnet on her head covered her unkempt, grizzly hair, and a cob pipe and bag of tobacco lay at her hand. She was ready for departure. Cassandra had returned, and her gratuitous neighborly offices were at an end. The girl was stooping before the fire, arranging a cake of corn-bread to cook in the ashes. A crane swung over the flames on which a fat iron kettle was hung, and the large coffee-pot stood on the hearth. The odor of breakfast was

savory and appetizing. As David's tall form cast a shadow across the sunlit space on the floor, the old mother's voice called to him from the corner.

"Come right in, Doctah; take a cheer and set. Your breakfast's ready, I reckon. How have you slept, suh?"

The girl at the fire rose and greeted him, but he missed the boy. "Where's the little chap?" he asked.

"Cassandry sont him out to wash up. F'ust thing she do when she gets home is to begin on Hoyle and wash him up."

"He do get that dirty, poor little son," said the girl. "It's like I have to torment him some. Will you have breakfast now, suh? Just take your chair to the table, and I'll fetch it directly."

"Won't I, though! What air you have up here! It makes me hungry merely to breathe. Is it this way all the time?"

"Hit's this-a-way a good deal," said Sally, from under her sunbonnet. "Oh, the' is days hit's some colder, like to make water freeze right hard, but most days hit's a heap warmer than this."

"That's so," said the invalid. "I hev seen it so warm a heap o' winters 'at the trees gits fooled into thinkin' hit's spring an' blossoms all out, an' then come along a late freez'n' spell an' gits ther fruit all killed. Hit's quare how they does do that-a-way. We-all hates it when the days come warm in Feb'uary."

"Then you must have been glad to have snow yesterday. I was disappointed. I was running away from that sort of thing, you know."

Thryng's breakfast was served to him as had been his supper of the evening before, directly from the fire. As he ate he looked out upon the usual litter of corn fodder scattered about near the house, and a few implements of the simplest character for cultivating the small pocket of rich soil below, but beyond this and surrounding it was a scene of the wildest beauty. Giant forest trees, intertwined and almost overgrown by a tangle of wild grapevines, hid the fall from sight, and behind them the mountain rose abruptly. A continuous stream of clearest water, icy cold, fell from high above into a long trough made of a hollow log. There at the running water stood

little Hoyle, his coarse cotton towel hung on an azalia shrub, giving himself a thorough scrubbing. In a moment he came in panting, shivering, and shining, and still wet about the hair and ears.

"Why, you are not half dry, son," said his sister. She took the towel from him and gave his head a vigorous rubbing. "Go and get warm, honey, and sister'll give you breakfast by the fire." She turned to David: "Likely you take milk in your coffee. I never thought to ask you." She left the room and returned with a cup of new milk, warm and sweet. He was glad to get it, finding his black coffee sweetened only with molasses unpalatable.

"Don't you take milk in your coffee? How came you to think of it for me?"

"I knew a lady at the hotel last summer. She said that up no'th 'most everybody does take milk or cream, one, in their coffee."

"I never seed sech. Hit's clar waste to my thinkin'."

Cassandra smiled. "That's because you never could abide milk. Mothah thinks it's only fit to make buttah and raise pigs on."

Old Sally's horse, a thin, wiry beast, gray and speckled, stood ready saddled near the door, his bridle hanging from his neck, the bit dangling while he also made his repast. When he had finished his corn and she had finished her elaborate farewells at the bedside, and little Hoyle had with much effort succeeded in bridling her steed, she stepped quickly out and gained her seat on the high, narrow saddle with the ease of a young girl. Meagre as a willow withe in her scant black cotton gown, perched on her bony gray beast, and only the bowl of her cob pipe projecting beyond the rim of her sunbonnet as indication that a face might be hidden in its depths, with a meal sack containing in either end sundry gifts — salt pork, chicken, corn-bread, and meal — slung over the horse's back behind her, and with contentment in her heart, Aunt Sally rode slowly over the hills to rejoin her old man.

Soon she left the main road and struck out into a steep, narrow trail, merely a mule track arched with hornbeam and dogwood and mulberry trees, and towered over by

giant chestnuts and oaks and great white pines and deep green hemlocks. Through myriad leafless branches the wind soughed pleasantly overhead, unfelt by her, so completely was she protected by the thickly growing laurel and rhododendron on either side of her path. The snow of the day before was gone, leaving only the glistening wetness of it on stones and fallen leaves and twigs underfoot, while in open spaces the sun beat warmly down upon her.

The trail led by many steep scrambles and sharp descents more directly to her home than the road, which wound and turned so frequently as to more than double the distance. At intervals it cut across the road or followed it a little way, only to diverge again. Here and there other trails crossed it or branched from it, leading higher up the mountain, or off into some gorge following the course of a stream, so that, except to one accustomed to its intricacies, the path might easily be lost.

Old Sally paid no heed to her course, apparently leaving the choice of trails to her horse. She sat easily on the beast and smoked her pipe until it was quite out, when she stowed it away in the black cloth bag, which dangled from her elbow by its strings. Spying a small sassafras shrub leaning toward her from the bank above her head, she gave it a vigorous pull as she passed and drew it, root and all, from its hold in the soil, beat it against the mossy bank, and swished it upon her skirt to remove the earth clinging to it. Then, breaking off a bit of the root, she chewed it, while she thrust the rest in her bag and used the top for a switch with which to hasten the pace of her nag.

The small stones, loosened when she tore the shrub from the bank, rattled down where the soil had been washed away, leaving the steep shelving rock side of the mountain bare, and she heard them leap the smooth space and fall softly on the moss among the ferns and lodged leaves below. There, crouched in the sun, lay a man with a black felt hat covering his face. The stones falling about him caused him to raise himself stealthily and peer upward. Descrying only the lone woman and the gray horse, he gave a low peculiar cry, almost like that of an animal in distress. She drew rein sharply and listened. The cry was repeated a little louder.

"Come on up hyar, Frale. Hit's on'y me. Hu' come you thar?"

He climbed rapidly up through the dense undergrowth, and stood at her side, breathing quickly. For a moment they waited thus, regarding each other, neither speaking. The boy — he seemed little more than a youth — looked up at her with a singularly innocent and appealing expression, but gradually as he saw her impassive and unrelenting face, his own resumed a hard and sullen look, which made him appear years older. His forehead was damp and cold, and a lock of silken black hair, slightly curling over it, increased its whiteness. Dark, heavy rings were under his eyes, which gleamed blue as the sky between long dark lashes. His arms dropped listlessly at his side, and he stood before her, as before a dread judge, bareheaded and silent. He bore her look only for a minute, then dropped his eyes, and his hand clinched more tightly the rim of his old felt hat. When he ceased looking at her, her eyes softened.

"I 'low ye mus' hev suthin' to say fer yourse'f," she said.

"I reckon." The corners of his mouth drooped, and he did not look up. He made as if to speak further, but only swallowed and was silent.

"Ye reckon? Waal, why'n't ye say?"

"They hain't nothin' to say. He war mean an' — an' — he's dade. I reckon he's dade."

"Yas, he's dade — an' they done had the buryin'." Her voice was monotonous and plaintive. A pallor swept over his face, and he drew the back of his hand across his mouth.

"He knowed he hadn't ought to rile me like he done. I be'n tryin' to make his hoss go home, but I cyan't. Hit jes' hangs round thar. I done brung him down an' lef' him in your shed, an' I 'lowed p'rhaps Uncle Jerry'd take him ovah to his paw." Again he swallowed and turned his face away. "The critter'd starve up yander. Anyhow, I ain't hoss stealin'. Hit war mo'n a hoss 'twixt him an' me." From the low, quiet tones of the two no one would have dreamed that a tragedy lay beneath their words.

"Look a-hyar, Frale. Thar wa'n't nothin' 'twixt him

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an' you. Ye war both on ye full o' mean corn whiskey, an' ye war quarrellin' 'bouts Cass." A faint red stole into the boy's cheeks, and the blue gleam of his eyes between the dark lashes narrowed to a mere line, as he looked an instant in her face and then off up the trail.

"Hain't ye seed nobody?" he asked.

"You knows I hain't seed nobody to hurt you-uns 'thout I'd tell ye. Look a-hyar, son, you are hungerin'. Come home with me, an' I'll get ye suthin' to eat. Ef you don't, ye'll go back an' fill up on whiskey agin, an' thar'll be the end of ye." He walked on a few steps at her side, then stopped suddenly.

"I 'low I better bide whar I be. You-uns hain't been yandah to the fall, have ye?"

"I have. You done a heap mo'n you reckoned on. When Marthy heered o' the killin', she jes' drapped whar she stood. She war out doin' work 'at you'd ought to 'a' been doin' fer her, an' she hain't moved sence. She like to 'a' perished lyin' out thar. Pore little Hoyle, he run all the way to our place he war that skeered, an' 'lowed she war dade, an' me an' the ol' man went ovah, an' thar we found her lyin' in the yard, an' the cow war lowin' to be milked, an' the pig squeelin' like hit war stuck, fer hunger. Hit do make me clar plumb mad when I think how you hev acted, — jes' like you' paw. Ef he'd nevah 'a' started that thar still, you'd nevah 'a' been what ye be now, a-drinkin' yer own whiskey at that. Come on home with me."

"I reckon I'm bettah hyar. They mount be thar huntin' me."

"I know you're hungerin'. I got suthin' ye can eat, but I 'lowed if you'd come, I'd get you an' the ol' man a good chick'n fry." She took from her stores, slung over the nag, a piece of corn-bread and a large chunk of salt pork, and gave them into his hand. "Thar! Eat. Hit's heart'nin'."

He was suffering, as she thought, and reached eagerly for the food, but before tasting it he looked up again into her face, and the infantile appeal had returned to his eyes.

"Tell me more 'bouts maw," he said.

"You eat, an' I'll talk," she replied. He broke a large piece from the corn-cake and crowded the rest into his

pocket. Then he drew forth a huge clasp-knife and cut a thick slice from the raw salt pork, and pulling a red cotton handkerchief from his belt, he wrapped it around the remainder and held it under his arm as he ate.

"She hain't able to move 'thout hollerin', she's that bad hurted. Paw an' I, we got her to bed, an' I been thar ever since with all to do ontwell Cass come. Likely she done broke her hip."

"Is Cass thar now? Hu' come she thar?" Again the blood sought his cheeks.

"Paw rode down to the settlement and telegrafted fer her. Pore thing! You don't reckon what-all you have done. I wisht you'd 'a' took aftah your maw. She war my own sister, 'nd she war that good she must 'a' went straight to glory when she died. Your paw, he like to 'a' died too that time, an' when he married Marthy Merlin, I reckoned he war cured o' his ways; but hit did'n' last long. Marthy, she done well by him, an' she done well by you, too. They hain't nothin' agin Marthy. She be'n a good stepmaw to ye, she hev, an' now see how you done her, an' Cass givin' up her school an' comin' home thar to ten' beastes an' do your work like she war a man. Her family wa'n't brought up that-a-way, nor mine wa'n't neither. Big fool Marthy war to marry with your paw. Hit's that-a-way with all the Farwells; they been that quarellin' an' bad, makin' mean whiskey an' drinkin' hit raw, killin' hyar an' thar, an' now you go doin' the same, an' my own nephew, too." Her face remained impassive, and her voice droned on monotonously, but two tears stole down her wrinkled cheeks. His face settled into its harder lines as she talked, but he made no reply, and she continued querulously: "Why'n't you pay heed to me long ago, when I tol' ye not to open that thar still again? You are a heap too young to go that-a-way, — my own kin, like to be hung fer man-killin'."

"When did Cass come?" he interrupted sullenly.

"Las' evenin'."

"I'll drap 'round thar this evenin' er late night, I reckon. I have to get feed fer my own hoss an' tote hit up er take him back — one. All I fetched up last week he done et." He turned to walk away, but stood with averted head as she began speaking again.

"Don't you do no such fool thing. You keep clar o' thar. Bring the hoss to me, an' I'll ride him home. What you want o' the beast on the mountain, anyhow? Hit's only like to give away whar ye'r' at. All you want is to git to see Cass, but hit won't do you no good, leastways not now. You done so bad she won't look at ye no more, I reckon. They is a man thar, too, now." He started back, his hands clinched, his head lifted, in his whole air an animal-like ferocity. "Thar now, look at ye. 'Tain't you he's after."

" 'Tain't me I'm feared he's after. How come he thar?"

"He come with her las' evenin' —" A sound of horses' hoofs on the road far below arrested her. They both waited, listening intently. "Thar they be. Git," she whispered. "Cass tol' me ef I met up with ye, to say 'at she'd leave suthin' fer ye to eat on the big rock 'hind the holly tree at the head o' the fall." She leaned down to him and held him by the coat an instant, "Son, leave whiskey alone. Hit's the only way you kin do to get her."

"Yas, Aunt Sally," he murmured. His eyes thanked her with one look for the tone or the hope her words held out.

Again the laugh, nearer this time, and again the wild look of haunting fear in his face. He dropped where he stood and slipped stealthily as a cat back to the place where he had lain, and crawling on his belly toward a heap of dead leaves caught by the brush of an old fallen pine, he crept beneath them and lay still. His aunt did not stir. Patting her horse's neck, she sat and waited until the voices drew nearer, came close beneath her as the road wound, and passed on. Then she once more moved along toward her cabin.

CHAPTER IV

DAVID SPENDS HIS FIRST DAY AT HIS CABIN, AND FRALE MAKES HIS CONFESSION

Doctor Hoyle had built his cabin on one of the pinnacles of the earth, and David, looking down on blue billowing mountain tops with only the spaces of the air between him and heaven — between him and the ocean — between him and his fair English home — felt that he knew why the old doctor had chosen it.

Seated on a splint-bottomed chair in the doorway, pondering, he thought first of his mother, with a little secret sorrow that he could not have taken to his heart the bride she had selected for him, and settled in his own home to the comfortable ease the wife's wealth would have secured for him. It was not that the money had been made in commerce; he was neither a snob nor a cad. Although his own connections entitled him to honor, what more could he expect than to marry wealth and be happy, if — if happiness could come to either of them in that way. No, his heart did not lean toward her; it was better that he should bend to his profession in a strange land. But not this, to live a hermit's life in a cabin on a wild hilltop. How long must it be — how long?

Brooding thus, he gazed at the distance of ever paling blue, and mechanically counted the ranges and peaks below him. An inaccessible tangle of laurel and rhododendron clothed the rough and precipitous wall of the mountain side, which fell sheer down until lost in purple shadow, with a mantle of green, deep and rich, varied by the gray of the lichen-covered rocks, the browns and reds of the bare branches of deciduous trees, and the paler tints of feathery pines. Here and there, from damp, springy places, dark hemlocks rose out of the mass, tall and majestic, waving their plumy tops, giant sentinels of the wilderness.

Gradually his mood of brooding retrospect changed, and he knew himself to be glad to his heart's core. He

could understand why, out of the turmoil of the Middle Ages, men chose to go to sequestered places and become hermits. No tragedies could be in this primeval spot, and here he would rest and build again for the future. He was pleased to sit thus musing, for the climb had taken more strength than he could well spare. His cabin was not yet habitable, for the simple things Doctor Hoyle had accumulated to serve his needs were still locked in well-built cupboards, as he had left them.

Thryng meant soon to go to work, to take out the bed covers and air them, and to find the canvas and nail it over the framework beside the cabin which was to serve as a sleeping apartment. All should be done in time. That was a good framework, strongly built, with the corner posts set deep in the ground to keep it firm on this wind-swept height, and with a door in the side of the cabin opening into the canvas room. Ah, yes, all that the old doctor did was well and thoroughly done.

His appetite sharpened by the climb and the bracing air, David investigated the contents of one of those melon-shaped baskets which Cassandra had given him when he started for his new home that morning, with little Hoyle as his guide.

Ah, what hospitable kindness they had shown to him, a stranger! Here were delicate bits of fried chicken, sweet and white, corn-bread, a glass of honey, and a bottle of milk. Nothing better need a man ask; and what animals men are, after all, he thought, taking delight in the mere acts of eating and breathing and sleeping.

Utterly weary, he would not trouble to open the cot which lay in the cabin, but rolled himself in his blanket on the wide, flat rock at the verge of the mountain. Here, warmed by the sun, he lay with his face toward the blue distance and slept dreamlessly and soundly, — very soundly, for he was not awakened by a crackling of the brush and scrambling of feet struggling up the mountain wall below his hard resting-place. Yet the sound kept on, and soon a head appeared above the rock, and two hands were placed upon it; then a strong, catlike spring landed the lithe young owner of the head only a few feet away from the sleeper.

It was Frale, his soft felt hat on the back of his head

and the curl of dark hair falling upon his forehead. For an instant, as he gazed on the sleeping figure, the wild look of fear was in his eyes; then, as he bethought himself of the words of Aunt Sally, "They is a man thar," the expression changed to one more malevolent and repulsive, transforming and aging the boyish face. Cautiously he crept nearer, and peered into the face of the unconscious Englishman. His hands clinched and his lips tightened, and he made a movement with his foot as if he would spurn him over the cliff.

As suddenly the moment passed; he drew back in shame and looked down at his hands, blood-guilty hands as he knew them to be, and, with lowered head, he moved swiftly away.

He was a youth again, hungry and sad, stumbling along the untrodden way, avoiding the beaten path, yet unerringly taking his course toward the cleft rock at the head of the fall behind the great holly tree. It was not the food Cassandra had promised him that he wanted now, but to look into the eyes of one who would pity and love him. Heartsick and weary as he never had been in all his young life, lonely beyond bearing, he hurried along.

As he forced a path through the undergrowth, he heard the sound of a mountain stream, and, seeking it, he followed along its rocky bed, leaping from one huge block of stone to another, and swinging himself across by great overhanging sycamore boughs, drawing, by its many windings, nearer and nearer to the spot where it precipitated itself over the mountain wall. Ever the noise of the water grew louder, until at last, making a slight detour, he came upon the very edge of the descent, where he could look down and see his home nestled in the cove at the foot of the fall, the blue smoke curling upward from its great chimney.

He seated himself upon a jutting rock well screened by laurel shrubs on all sides but the one toward the fall. There, his knees clasped about with his arms, and his chin resting upon them, he sat and watched.

Behind the leafage and tangle of bare stems and twigs, he was so far above and so directly over the spot on which his gaze was fixed as to be out of the usual range of sight from below, thus enabling him to see plainly what was

transpiring about the house and sheds, without himself being seen.

Long and patiently he waited. Once a dog barked, — his own dog Nig. Some one must be approaching. What if the little creature should seek him out and betray him! He quivered with the thought. The day before he had driven him down the mountain, beating him off whenever he returned. Should the animal persist in tracking him, he would kill him.

He peered more eagerly down, and saw little Hoyle run out of the cow shed and twist himself this way and that to see up and down the road. Both the child and the dog seemed excited. Yes, there they were, three horsemen coming along the highway. Now they were dismounting and questioning the boy. Now they disappeared in the house. He did not move. Why were they so long within? Hours, it seemed to Frale, but in reality it was only a short search they were making there. They were longer looking about the sheds and yard. Hoyle accompanied them everywhere, his hands in his pockets, standing about, shivering with excitement.

All around they went peering and searching, thrusting their arms as far as they could reach into the stacks of fodder, looking into troughs and corn sacks, setting the fowls to cackling wildly, even hauling out the long corn stalks from the wagon which had served to make Thryng's ride the night before comfortable. No spot was overlooked.

Frequently they stood and parleyed. Then Frale's heart would sink within him. What if they should set Nig to track him! Ah, he would strangle the beast and pitch him over the fall. He would spring over after him before he would let himself be taken and hanged. Oh, he could feel the strangling rope around his neck already! He could not bear it — he could not!

Thus cowering, he waited, starting at every sound from below as if to run, then sinking back in fear, breathless with the pounding of his heart in his breast. Now the voices came up to him painfully clear. They were talking to little Hoyle angrily. What they were saying he could not make out, but he again cautiously lifted his head and looked below. Suddenly the child drew back and lifted

his arm as if to ward off a blow, but the blow came. Frale saw one of the men turn as he mounted his horse to ride away, and cut the boy cruelly across his face and arm with his rawhide whip. The little one's shriek of fright and pain pierced his big brother to the heart and caused him to forget for the moment his own abject fear.

He made as if he would leap the intervening space to punish the brute, but a cry of anger died in his throat as he realized his situation. The selfishness of his fear, however, was dispelled, and he no longer cringed as before, but had the courage again to watch, awake and alert to all that passed beneath him.

Hoyle's cry brought Cassandra out of the house flying. She walked up to the man like an angry tigress. Frale rose to his knees and strained eagerly forward.

"If you are such a coward you must hit something small and weak, you can strike a woman. Hit me," she panted, putting the child behind her.

Muttering, the man rode sullenly away. "He no business hangin' roun' we-uns, list'nin' to all we say."

Frale could not make out the words, but his face burned red with rage. Had he been in hiding down below, he would have wreaked vengeance on the man; as it was, he stood up and boldly watched them ride away in the opposite direction from which they had come.

He sank back and waited, and again the hours passed. All was still but the rushing water and the gentle soughing of the wind in the tops of the towering pines. At last he heard a rustling and sniffing here and there. His heart stood still, then pounded again in terror. They had — they had set Nig to track him. Of course the dog would seek for his old friend and comrade, and they — they would wait until they heard his bark of joy, and then they would seize him.

He crept close to the rock where the water rushed, not a foot away, and clinging to the tough laurel behind him, leaned far over. To drop down there would mean instant death on the rocks below. It would be terrible — almost as horrible as the strangling rope. He would wait until they were on him, and then — nearer and nearer came the erratic trotting and scratching of the dog among the leaves — and then, if only he could grapple with the man

who had struck his little brother, he would drag him over with him. A look of fierce joy leaped in his eyes, which were drawn to a narrow blue gleam as he waited.

Suddenly Nig burst through the undergrowth and sprang to his side, but before the dog could give his first bark of delight the yelp was crushed in his throat, and he was hurled with the mighty force of frenzy, a black, writhing streak of animate nature into the rushing water, and there swept down, tossed on the rocks, taken up and swirled about and thrown again upon the rocks, no longer animate, but a part of nature's own, to return to his primal elements.

It was done, and Frale looked at his hands helplessly, feeling himself a second time a murderer. Yet he was in no way more to blame for the first than for this. As yet a boy untaught by life, he had not learned what to do with the forces within him. They rose up madly and mastered him. With a man's power to love and hate, a man's instincts, his untamed nature ready to assert itself for tenderness or cruelty, without a man's knowledge of the necessity for self-control, where some of his kind would have been inert and listless, his inheritance had made him intense and fierce. Loving and gentle and kind he could be, yet when stirred by liquor, or anger, or fear, — most terrible.

His deed had been accomplished with such savage deftness that none pursuing could have guessed the tragedy. They might have waited long in the open spaces for the dog's return or the sound of his joyous yelp of recognition, but the sacrifice was needless. The affectionate creature had been searching on his own behalf, careless of the blows with which his master had driven him from his side the day before.

Trembling, Frale crouched again. The silence was filled with pain for him. The moments swept on, even as the water rushed on, and the sun began to drop behind the hills, leaving the hollows in deepening purple gloom. At last, deeming that the search for the time must have been given up, he crept cautiously toward the great holly tree, not for food, but for hope. There, back in the shadow, he sat on a huge log, his head bowed between his hands, and listened.

Presently the silence was broken by a gentle stirring of the fallen leaves, not erratically this time, only a steady moving forward of human feet. Again Frale's heart bounded and the red sought his cheek, but now with a new emotion. He knew of but one footstep which would advance toward his ambush in that way. Peering out from among the deepest shadows, he watched the spot where Cassandra had promised food should be placed for him, his eyes no longer a narrow slit of blue, but wide and glad, his face transformed from the strain of fear with eager joy.

Soon she emerged, walking wearily. She carried a bundle of food tied in a cloth, and an old overcoat of rough material trailed over one arm. These she deposited on the flat stone, then stood a moment leaning against the smooth gray bole of the holly tree, breathing quickly from the exertion of the steep climb.

Her eyes followed the undulating line of the mountain above them, rising tree-fringed against the sky, to where the highest peak cut across the setting sun, haloed by its long rays of gold. No cloud was there, but sweeping down the mountain side were the earth mists, glowing with iridescent tints, draping the crags and floating over the purple hollows, the verdure of the pines showing through it all, gilded and glorified.

Cassandra waiting there might have been the dryad of the tree come out to worship in the evening light and grow beautiful. So Thryng would have thought, could he have seen her with the glow on her face, and in her eyes, and lighting up the fires in her hair; but no such classic dream came to the youth lingering among the shadows, ashamed to appear before her, bestowing on her a dumb adoration, unformed and wordless.

Because his friend had maudlinly boasted that he was the better man in her eyes, and could any day win her for himself, he had killed him. Despite all the anguish the deed had wrought in his soul, he felt unrepentant now, as his eyes rested on her. He would do it again, and yet it was that very boast that had first awakened in his heart such thought of her.

For years Cassandra had been as his sister, although no tie of blood existed between them, but suddenly the idea of

possession had sprung to life in him, when another had assumed the right as his. Frale had not looked on her since that moment of revelation, of which she was so ignorant and so innocent. Now, filled with the shame of his deed and his desires, he stood in a torment of longing, not daring to move. His knees shook and his arms ached at his sides, and his eyes filled with hot tears.

Quickly the sun dropped below the edge of the mountain. Cassandra drew a long sigh, and the glow left her face. She looked an instant lingeringly at the articles she had brought, and turned sadly away. Then he took a step toward her with hands outstretched, forgetful of his shame, and all, except that she was slipping away from him. Arrested by the sound of his feet among the leaves, she spoke.

"Frale, are you there?" Her voice was low as if she feared other ears than his might hear

He did not move again, and speak he could not, for remembrance rushed back stiflingly and overwhelmed him. Descrying his white face in the shadow, a pity as deep as his shame filled her heart and drew her nearer.

"Why, Frale, come out here. No one can see you, only me."

Still tongue-tied by his emotion, he came into the light and stood near her. In dismay she looked up in his face. The big boy brother who had taken her to the little Carew Crossing station only two months before, rough and prankish as the colt he drove, but gentle withal, was gone. He who stood at her side was older. Anger had left its mark about his mouth, and fear had put a strange wildness in his eyes — but — there was something else in his reckless, set lips that hurt her. She shrank from him, and he took a step closer. Then she placed a soothing hand on his arm and perceived he was quivering. She thought she understood, and the soft pity moistened her eyes and deepened in her heart.

"Don't be afraid, Frale; they're gone long ago, and won't come back — not for a while, I reckon."

He smiled faintly, never taking his eyes from her face. "I hain't afeared o' them. I hev been, but —" He shook her hand from his arm and made as if he would push her away, then suddenly he leaned toward her and caught

her in his arms, clasping her so closely that she could feel his wildly beating heart.

"Frale, Frale! Don't, Frale. You never used to do me this way."

"No, I never done you this-a-way. I wisht I had. I be'n a big fool." He kissed her, the first kisses of his young manhood, on brow and cheeks and lips, in spite of her useless writhings. He continued muttering as he held her: "I sinned fer you. I killed a man. He said he'd hev you. He 'lowed he'd go down yander to the school whar you war at an' marry you an' fetch you back. I war a fool to 'low you to go thar fer him to foller an' get you. I killed him. He's dade."

The short, interrupted sentences fell on her ears like blows. She ceased struggling and, drooping upon his bosom, wept, sobbing heart-brokenly.

"Oh, Frale!" she moaned, "if you had only told me, I could have given you my promise and you would have known he was lying and spared him and saved your own soul." He little knew the strength of his arms as he held her. "Frale! I am like to perish, you are hurting me so."

He loosed her and she sank, a weary, frightened heap, at his feet. Then very tenderly he gathered her in his arms and carried her to the great flat rock and placed her on the old coat she had brought him.

"You know I wouldn't hurt you fer the hull world, Cass." He knelt beside her, and throwing his arms across her lap buried his face in her dress, still trembling with his unmastered emotion. She thought him sobbing.

"Can you give me your promise now, Cass?"

"Now? Now, Frale, your hands are blood-guilty," she said, slowly and hopelessly.

He grew cold and still, waiting in the silence. His hands clutched her clothing, but he did not lift his head. He had shed blood and had lost her. They might take him and hang him. At last he told her so, brokenly, and she knew not what to do.

Gently she placed her hand on his head and drew the thick silken hair through her fingers, and the touch, to his stricken soul, was a benediction. The pity of her cooled the fever in his blood and swept over his spirit the breath of healing. For the first time, after the sin

and the horror of it, after the passion and its anguish, came tears. He wept and wiped his tears with her dress.

Then she told him how her mother had been hurt. How Hoyle had driven the half-broken colt and the mule all the way to Carew's alone, to bring her home, and how he had come nigh being killed. How a gentleman had helped her when the colt tried to run and the mule was mean, and how she had brought him home with her.

Then he lifted his head and looked at her, his haggard face drawn with suffering, and the calmness of her eyes still further soothed and comforted him. They were filled with big tears, and he knew the tears were for him, for the change which had come upon him, lonely and wretched, doomed to hide out on the mountain, his clothes torn by the brambles and soiled by the red clay of the holes into which he had crawled to hide himself. He rose and sat at her side and held her head on his shoulder with gentle hand.

"Pore little sister — pore little Cass! I been awful mean an' bad," he murmured. "Hit's a badness I cyan't 'count fer no ways. When I seed that thar doctah man — I reckon hit war him I seed lyin' asleep up yander on Hangin' Rock — a big tall man, right thin an' white in the face —" he paused and swallowed as if loath to continue.

"Frale!" she cried, and would have drawn away but that he held her.

"I didn't hurt him, Cass. I mount hev. I lef' him lie thar an' never woke him nor teched him, but — I felt hit here — the badness." He struck his chest with his fist. "I lef' thar fast an' come here. Ever sence I killed Ferd, hit's be'n follerin' me that-a-way. I reckon I'm cursed to hell-fire fer hit now, ef they take me er ef they don't — hit's all one; hit's thar whar I'm goin' at the las'."

"Frale, there is a way —"

"Yes, they is one way — only one. Ef you'll give me your promise, Cass, I'll get away down these mountains, an' I'll work; I'll work hard an' get you a house like one I seed to the settlement, Cass, I will. Hit's you, Cass. Ever sence Ferd said that word, I be'n plumb out'n my hade. Las' night I slep' in Wild Cat Hole, an' I war that hungered an' lone, I tried to pray like your maw done teached me, an' I couldn' think of nothin' to say, on'y

just, 'Oh, Lord, Cass!' That-a-way — on'y your name, Cass, Cass, all night long."

"I reckon Satan put my name in your heart, Frale; 'pears to me like it is sin."

"Naw! Satan nevah put your name thar. He don't meddle with sech as you. He war a-tryin' to get your name out'n my heart, that's what he war tryin', fer he knowed I'd go bad right quick ef he could. Hit war your name kep' my hands off'n that doctah man thar on the rock. Give me your promise now, Cass. Hit'll save me."

"Then why didn't it save you from killing Ferd?" she asked.

"O Gawd!" he moaned, and was silent.

"Listen, Frale," she said at last. "Can't you see it's sin for you and me to sit here like this — like we dared to be sweethearts, when you have shed blood for this? Take your hands off me, and let me go down to mothah."

Slowly his hold relaxed and his head drooped, but he did not move his arms. She pushed them gently from her and stood a moment looking down at him. His arms dropped upon the stone at his side, listless and empty, and again her pitying soul reached out to him and enveloped him.

"Frale, there is just one way that I can give you my promise," she said. He held out his arms to her. "No, I can't sit that way; you can see that. The good book says, 'Ye must repent and be born again.'" He groaned and covered his face with his hands. "Then you would be a new man, without sin. I reckon you have suffered a heap, and repented a heap — since you did that, Frale?"

"I'm 'feared — I'm 'feared ef he war here an' riled me agin like he done that time — I'm 'feared I'd do hit agin — like he war talkin' 'bouts you, Cass." He rose and stood close to her.

The soft dusk was wrapping them about, and she began to fear lest she lose her control over him. She took up the bundle of food and placed it in his hand.

"Here, take this, and the coat, too, Frale. Come down and have suppah with mothah and me to-night, and sleep in your own bed. They won't search here for one while, I reckon, and you'll be safah than hiding in Wild Cat Hole.

Hoyle heard them say they reckoned you'd lit off down the mountain, and were hiding in some near-by town. They'll hunt you there first; come."

She walked on, and he obediently followed. "When we get nigh the house, I'll go first and see if the way is clear. You wait back. If I want you to run, I'll call twice, quick and sharp, but if I want you to come right in, I'll call once, low and long."

After that no word was spoken. They clambered down the steep, winding path, and not far from the house she left him. She wondered Nig did not bound out to greet her, but supposed he must be curled up near the hearth in comfort. Frale also thought of the dog as he sat cowering under the laurel shrubs, and set his teeth in anguish and sorrow.

"Cass'll hate hit when she finds out," he muttered.

After a moment, waiting and listening, he heard her long, low call float out to him. Falling on his hurt spirit, it sounded heavenly sweet.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH CASSANDRA GOES TO DAVID WITH HER TROUBLE, AND GIVES FRALE HER PROMISE

After his sleep on Hanging Rock, David, allured by the sunset, remained long in his doorway idly smoking his pipe, and ruminating, until a normal and delightful hunger sent him striding down the winding path toward the blazing hearth where he had found such kindly welcome the evening before. There, seated tilted back against the chimney side, he found a huge youth, innocent of face and gentle of mien, who rose as he entered and offered him his chair, and smiled and tossed back a falling lock from his forehead as he gave him greeting.

"This hyar is Doctah Thryng, Frale, who done me up this-a-way. He 'lows he's goin' to git me well so's I can walk again. How air you, suh? You certainly do look a heap better'n when you come las' evenin'."

"So I am, indeed. And you?" David's voice rang out gladly. He went to the bed and bent above the old woman, looking her over carefully. "Are you comfortable? Do the weights hurt you?" he asked.

"I cyan't say as they air right comfortable, but ef they'll help me to git 'round agin, I reckon I can bar hit."

Early that morning, with but the simplest means, David had arranged bandages and weights of wood to hold her in position.

She was so slight he hoped the broken hip might right itself with patience and care, more especially as he learned that her age was not so advanced as her appearance had led him to suppose.

Now all suspicion of him seemed to have vanished from the household. Hoyle, happy when the fascinating doctor noticed him, leaned against his chair, drinking in his words eagerly. But when Thryng drew him to his knee and discovered the cruel mark across his face and asked how it had happened, a curious change crept over them all. Every face became as expressionless as a mask; only the

boy's eyes sought his brother's, then turned with a frightened look toward Cassandra as if seeking help.

Thryng persisted in his examination, and lifted the boy's face toward the light. If the big brother had done this deed, he should be made to feel shame for it. The welt barely escaped the eye, which was swollen and discolored; and altogether the face presented a pitiable appearance.

As David talked, the hard look which had been exorcised for a time by the gentle influence of that home, and more than all by the sight of Cassandra performing the gracious services of the household, settled again upon the youth's face. His lips were drawn, and his eyes ceased following Cassandra, and became fixed and narrowed on one spot.

"You have come near losing that splendid eye of yours, do you know that, little chap?" Hoyle grinned. "It's a shame, you know. I have something up at the cabin would help to heal this, but —" he glanced about the room — "What are those dried herbs up there?"

"Thar is witch hazel yandah in the cupboard. Cass, ye mount bile some up fer th' doctah," said the mother. "Tell th' doctah hu-come hit happened, son; you hain't afeared of him, be ye?" A trampling of horse's hoofs was heard outside. "Go up garret to your own place, Frale. What ye bid'n here fer?" she added, in a hushed voice, but the youth sat doggedly still.

Cassandra went out and quickly returned. "It's your own horse, Frale. Poor beast! He's limping like he's been hurt. He's loose out there. You better look to him."

"Uncle Carew rode him down an' lef' him, I reckon." Frale rose and went out, and David continued his care of the child.

"How was it? Did your brother hurt you?"

"Naw. He nevah hurted me all his life. Hit — war my own se'f —"

Cassandra patted the child on his shoulder. "He can't beah to tell hu-come he is hurted this way, he is that proud. It was a mean, bad, coward man fetched him such a blow across the face. He asked little son something, and when Hoyle nevah said a word, he just lifted his arm and hit him, and then rode off like he had pleased him-

self." A flush of anger kindled in her cheeks. "Nevah mind, son. Doctah can fix you up all right."

A sigh of relief trembled through the boy's lips, and David asked no more questions.

"You hain't goin' to tie me up that-a-way, be you?" He pointed to the bed whereon his mother lay, and they all laughed, relieving the tension.

"Naw," shrilled the mother's voice, "but I reckon doctah mount take off your hade an' set hit on straight agin."

"I wisht he could," cried the child, no whit troubled by the suggestion. "I'd bar a heap fer to git my hade straight like Frale's." Just then his brother entered the room. "You reckon doctah kin take off my hade an' set hit straight like you carry yours, Frale?" Again they all laughed, and the big youth smiled such a sweet, infantile smile, as he looked down on his little brother, that David's heart warmed toward him.

He tousled the boy's hair as he passed and drew him along to the chimney side, away from the doctor. "Hit's a right good hade I'm thinkin' ef hit be set too fer round. They is a heap in hit, too, more'n they is in mine, I reckon."

"He's gettin' too big to set that-a-way on your knee, Frale. Ye make a baby of him," said the mother. The child made an effort to slip down, but Frale's arm closed more tightly about him, and he nestled back contentedly.

So the evening passed, and Thryng retired early to the bed in the loom shed. He knew something serious was amiss, but of what nature he could not conjecture, unless it were that Frale had been making illicit whiskey. Whatever it was, he chose to manifest no curiosity.

In the morning he saw nothing of the young man, and as a warm rain was steadily falling, he was glad to get the use of the horse, and rode away happily in the rain, with food provided for both himself and the beast sufficient for the day slung in a sack behind him.

"Reckon ye'll come back hyar this evenin'?" queried the old mother, as he adjusted her bandages before leaving.

"I'll see how the cabin feels after I have had a fire in the chimney all day."

As he left, he paused by Cassandra's side. She was standing by the spout of running water waiting for her

pail to fill. "If it happens that you need me for — anything at all, send Hoyle, and I'll come immediately. Will you?"

She lifted her eyes to his gratefully. "Thank you," was all she said, but his look impelled more. "You are right kind," she added.

Hardly satisfied, he departed, but turned in his saddle to glance back at her. She was swaying sidewise with the weight of the full pail, straining one slender arm as she bore it into the house. Who did all the work there, he wondered. That great youth ought to relieve her of such tasks. Where was he? Little did he dream that the eyes of the great youth were at that moment fixed darkly upon him from the small pane of glass set in under the cabin roof, which lighted Frale's garret room.

David stabled the horse in the log shed built by Doctor Hoyle for his own beast, — for what is life in the mountains without a horse, — then lingered awhile in his doorway looking out over the billows of ranges seen dimly through the fine veil of the falling rain. Ah, wonderful, perfect world it seemed to him, seen through the veil of the rain.

The fireplace in the cabin was built of rough stone, wide and high, and there he made him a brisk fire with fat pine and brushwood. He drew in great logs which he heaped on the broad stone hearth to dry. He piled them on the fire until the flames leaped and roared up the chimney, so long unused. He sat before it, delighting in it like a boy with a bonfire, and blessed his friend for sending him there, smoking a pipe in his honor. Among the doctor's few cooking utensils he found a stout iron tea-kettle and sallied out again in the wet to rinse it and fill it with fresh water from the spring. He had had only coffee since leaving Canada; now he would have a good cup of decent tea, so he hung the kettle on the crane and swung it over the fire.

In his search for his tea, most of his belongings were unpacked and tossed about the room in wild disorder, and a copy of *Marius the Epicurean* was brought to light. His kettle boiled over into the fire, and immediately the small articles on his pine table were shoved back in confusion to make room for his tea things, his bottle of milk, his corn pone, and his book.

Being by this time weary, he threw himself on his couch

and contentment began — his hot tea within reach, his door wide open to the sweetness of the day, his fire dancing and crackling with good cheer, and his book in his hand. Ah! The delicious idleness and rest! No disorders to heal — no bones to mend — no problems to solve; a little sipping of his tea — a little reading of his book — a little luxuriating in the warmth and the pleasant odor of pine boughs burning — a little dreamy revery, watching through the open door the changing lights on the hills, and listening to an occasional bird note, liquid and sweet.

The hour drew near to noon and the sky lightened and a rift of deep blue stretched across the open space before him. Lazily he speculated as to how he was to get his provisions brought up to him, and when and how he might get his mail, but laughed to think how little he cared for a hundred and one things which had filled his life and dogged his days ere this. Had he reached Nirvana? Nay, he could still hunger and thirst.

A footstep was heard without, and a figure appeared in his doorway, quietly standing, making no move to enter. It was Cassandra, and he was pleased.

"My first visitor!" he exclaimed. "Come in, come in. I'll make a place for you to sit in a minute." He shoved the couch away from before the fire, and removing a pair of trousers and a heap of hose from one of his splint-bottomed chairs, he threw them in a corner and placed it before the hearth. "You walked, didn't you? And your feet are wet, of course, Sit here and dry them."

She pushed back her sunbonnet and held out to him a quaint little basket made of willow withes, which she carried, but she took no step forward. Although her lips smiled a fleeting wraith of a smile that came and went in an instant, he thought her eyes looked troubled as she lifted them to his face.

He took the basket and lifted the cover. "I brought you some pa'triges," she said simply.

There lay three quail, and a large sweet potato, roasted in the ashes on their hearth as he had seen the corn pone baked the evening before, and a few round white cakes which he afterwards learned were beaten biscuit, all warm from the fire.

"How am I ever to repay you people for your kindness to me?" he said. "Come in and dry your feet. Never mind the mud; see how I've tracked it in all the morning. Come."

He led her to the fire, and replenished it, while she sat passively looking down on the hearth as if she scarcely heeded him. Not knowing how to talk to her, or what to do with her, he busied himself trying to bring a semblance of order to the cabin, occasionally dropping a remark to which she made no response. Then he also relapsed into silence, and the minutes dragged — age-long minutes, they seemed to him.

In his efforts at order, he spread his rug over the couch, tossed a crimson cushion on it and sundry articles beneath it to get them out of his way, then occupied himself with his book, while vainly trying to solve the riddle which his enigmatical caller presented to his imagination.

All at once she rose, sought out a few dishes from the cupboard, and, taking a neatly smoothed, coarse cloth from the basket, spread it over one end of the table and arranged thereon his dinner. Quietly David watched her, following her example of silence until forced to speak. Finally he decided to question her, if only he could think of questions which would not trespass on her private affairs, when at last she broke the stillness.

"I can't find any coffee. I ought to have brought some; I'll go fetch some if you'll eat now. Your dinner'll get cold."

He showed her how he had made tea and was in no need of coffee. "We'll throw this out and make fresh," he said gayly. "Then you must have a cup with me. Why, you have enough to eat here for three people!" She seemed weary and sad, and he determined to probe far enough to elicit some confidence, but the more fluent he became, the more effectively she withdrew from him.

"See here," he said at last, "sit by the table with me, and I will eat to your heart's content. I'll prepare you a cup of tea as I do my own, and then I want you to drink it. Come."

She yielded. His way of saying "Come" seemed like a command to be obeyed.

"Now, that is more like." He began his dinner with a

relish. "Won't you share this game with me? It is fine, you know."

He could not think her silent from embarrassment, for her poise seemed undisturbed except for the anxious look in her eyes. He determined to fathom the cause, and since no finesse availed, there remained but one way, — the direct question.

"What is it?" he said kindly. "Tell me the trouble, and let me help you."

She looked full into his eyes then, and her lips quivered. Something rose in her throat, and she swallowed helplessly. It was so hard for her to speak. The trouble had struck deeper than he dreamed.

"It is a trouble, isn't it? Can't you tell it to me?"

"Yes. I reckon there isn't any trouble worse than ours — no, I reckon there is nothing worse."

"Why, Miss Cassandra!"

"Because it's sin, and — and 'the wages of sin is death.'" Her tone was hopeless, and the sadness of it went to his heart.

"Is it whiskey?" he asked.

"Yes — it's whiskey 'stilling and — worse; it's —" She turned deathly white. Too sad to weep, she still held control of her voice. "It's a heap worse —"

"Don't try to tell me what it is," he cried. "Only tell me how I may help you. It's not your sin, surely, so you don't have to bear it."

"It's not mine, but I do have to bear it. I wish my bearing it was all. Tell me, if — if a man has done — such a sin, is it right to help him get away?"

"If it is that big brother of yours, whom I saw last night, I can't believe he has done anything so very wicked. You say it is not the whiskey?"

"Maybe it was the whiskey first — then — I don't know exactly how came it — I reckon he doesn't himself. I — he's not my brothah — not rightly, but he has been the same as such. They telegraphed me to come home quick. Bishop Towahs told me a little — all he knew, — but he didn't know what all was it, only some wrong to call the officahs and set them aftah Frale — poor Frale. He — he told me himself — last evening." She paused again, and the pallor slowly left her face and the red surged

into her cheeks and mounted to the waves of her heavy hair.

"It is Frale, then, who is in trouble! And you wish me to help him get away?" She looked down and was silent. "But I am a stranger, and know nothing about the country."

He pushed his chair away from the table and leaned back, regarding her intently.

"Oh, I am afraid for him." She put her hand to her throat and turned away her face from his searching eyes, in shame.

"I prefer not to know what he has done. Just explain to me your plan, and how I can help. You know better than I."

"I can't understand how comes it I can tell you; you are a strangah to all of us — and yet it seems like it is right. If I could get some clothes nobody has evah seen Frale weah — if — I could make him look different from a mountain boy, maybe he could get to some town down the mountain, and find work; but now they would meet up with him before he was halfway there."

Thryng rose and began pacing the room. "Is there any hurry?" he demanded, stopping suddenly before her.

"Yes."

"Then why have you waited all this time to tell me?"

She lifted her eyes to his in silence, and he knew well that she had not spoken because she could not, and that had he not ventured with his direct questions, she would have left him, carrying her burden with her, as hopelessly silent as when she came.

He sat beside her again and gently urged her to tell him without further delay all she had in her mind. "You feel quite sure that if he could get down the mountain side without being seen, he would be safe; where do you mean to send him? You don't think he would try to return?"

"Why — no, I reckon not — if — I —" Her face flamed, and she drew on her bonnet, hiding the crimson flush in its deep shadow. She knew that without the promise he had asked, the boy would as surely return as that the sun would continue to rise and set.

"He must stay," she spoke desperately and hurriedly. "If he can just make out to stay long enough to learn a

little — how to live, and will keep away from bad men — if I — he only knows enough to make mean corn liquor now — but he nevah was bad. He has always been different — and he is awful smart. I can't think how came he to change so."

Taking the empty basket with her, she walked toward the door, and David followed her. "Thank you for that good dinner," he said.

"Aunt Sally fetched the pa'triges. Her old man got them for mothah, and she said you sure ought to have half. Sally said the sheriff had gone back up the mountain, and I'm afraid he'll come to our place again this evening. Likely they're breaking up Frale's 'still' now."

"Well, that will be a good deed, won't it?"

The huge bonnet had hid her face from him, but now she lifted her eyes frankly to his, with a flash of radiance through her tears. "I reckon," was all she said.

"Are they likely to come up here, do you think, those men?"

"Not hardly. They would have to search on foot here. It's out of their way; only no place on the mountain is safe for Frale now."

"Send him to me quickly, then. I have cast my lot with you mountain people for some time to come, and your cause shall be mine."

She paused at the door with grateful words on her lips unuttered.

"Don't stop for thanks, Miss Cassandra; they are wasted between us. You have opened your doors to me, a stranger, and that is enough. Hurry, don't grieve — and see here: I may not be able to do anything, but I'll try; and if I can't get down to-night, won't you come again in the morning and tell me all about it?"

Instantly he thought better of his request, yet who was here to criticise? He laughed as he thought how firmly the world and its conventions held him. Sweet, simple-hearted child that she was, why, indeed, should she not come? Still he called after her. "If you are too busy, send Hoyle. I may be down to see your mother, anyway."

She paused an instant in her hurried walk. "I'll be right glad to come, if I can help you any way."

He stood watching her until she passed below his view,

as her long easy steps took her rapidly on, although she seemed to move slowly. Then he went back to his fire, and her words repeated themselves insistently in his mind — "I'll be right glad to come, if I can help you any way."

Aunt Sally was seated in the chimney-corner smoking, when Cassandra returned. "Where is he?" she cried.

"He couldn't set a minute, he was that restless. He 'lowed he'd go up to the rock whar you found him las' evenin'."

Without a word, Cassandra turned and fled up the steep toward the head of the fall. Every moment, she knew, was precious. Frale met her halfway down and took her hand, leading her as he had been used to do when she was his "little sister," and listened to her plans docilely enough.

"I mean you to go down to Farington, to Bishop Towahs'. He will give you work." She had not mentioned Thryng.

Frale laughed.

"Don't, Frale. How can you laugh?"

"I ra'ly hain't laughin', Cass. Seems like you fo'get how can I get down the mountain; but I reckon I'll try — if you say so."

Then she explained how the doctor had sent for him to come up there quickly, and how he would help him. "You must go now, Frale, you hear? Now!"

Again he laughed, bitterly this time. "Yas — I reckon he'll be right glad to help me get away from you. I'll go myse'f in my own way."

Under the holly tree they had paused, and suddenly she feared lest the boy at her side return to his mood of the evening before. She seized his hand again and hurried him farther up the steep.

"Come, come!" she cried. "I'll go with you, Frale."

"Naw, you won't go with me neithah," he said stubbornly, drawing back.

"Frale!" she pleaded. "Hear to me."

"I'm a-listenin'."

"Frale, I'm afraid. They may be on their way now. For all we know they may be right nigh."

"I've done got used to fearin' now. Hit don't hurt none. On'y one thing hurts now."

"I've been up to see Doctor Thryng, and he's promised

he'll fix you up some way so that if anybody does see you, they — they'll think you belong somewhere else, and nevah guess who you be. Frale, go."

He held her, with his arm about her waist, half carrying her with him, instead of allowing her to move her own free gait, and she tried vainly with her fingers to pull his hands away; but his muscles were like iron under her touch. He felt her helplessness and liked it. Her voice shook as she pleaded with him.

"Oh, Frale! Hear to me!" she wailed.

"I'll hear to you, ef you'll hear to me. Seems like I've lost my fear now. I hain't carin' no more. Ef I should see the sheriff this minute, an' he war a-puttin' his rope round my neck right now, I wouldn't care 'thout one thing — jes' one thing. I'd walk straight down to hell fer hit, — I reckon I hev done that, — but I'd walk till I drapped, an' work till I died for hit." He stood still a moment, and again she essayed to move his hands, but he only held her closer.

"Oh, hurry, Frale! I'm afraid. Oh, Frale, don't!"

"Be ye 'feared fer me, Cass?"

"You know that, Frale. Leave go, and hear to me."

"Be ye 'feared 'nough to give me your promise, Cass?"

"Take your hand off me, Frale."

"We'll go back. I 'low they mount es well take me first as last. I hain't no heart lef' in me. I don't care fer that thar doctah man he'pin' me, nohow," he choked.

"Leave me go, and I'll give you promise for promise, Frale. I can't make out is it sin or not; but if God can forgive and love — when you turn and seek Him — the Bible do say so, Frale, but — but seem like you don't repent your deed whilst you look at me like that way." She paused, trembling. "If you could be sorry like you ought to be, Frale, and turn your heart — I could die for that."

He still held her, but lifted one shaking hand above his head.

"Before God, I promise —"

"What, Frale? Say what you promise."

He still held his hand high. "All you ask of me, Cass. Tell me word by word, an' I'll promise fair."

"You will repent, Frale?"

"Yas."

"You will not drink?"

"I will not drink."

"You will heed when your own heart tells you the right way?"

"I will heed when my heart tells me the way: hit will be the way to you, Cass."

"Oh, don't say it that way, Frale. Now say, 'So help me God,' and don't think of me whilst you say it."

"Put your hand on mine, Cass. Lift hit up an' say with me that word." She placed her palm on his uplifted palm. "So help me, God," they said together. Then, with streaming tears, she put her arms about his neck and gently drew his face down to her own.

"I'll go back now, Frale, and you do all I've said. Go quick. I'll write Bishop Towahs, and he'll watch out for you, and find you work. Let Doctah Thryng help you. He sure is a good man. Oh, if you only could write!"

"I'll larn."

"You'll have a heap more to learn than you guess. I've been there, and I know. Don't give up, Frale, and — and stay —"

"I hain't going to give up with your promise here, Cass; kiss me."

She did so, and he slowly released her, looking back as he walked away.

"Oh, hurry, Frale! Don't look back. It's a bad omen." She turned, and without one backward glance descended the mountain.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH DAVID AIDS FRALE TO MAKE HIS ESCAPE

ELATED by his talk with Cassandra, Frale walked eagerly forward, but as he neared Thryng's cabin he moved more slowly. Why should he let that doctor help him? He could reach Farington some way — travelling by night and hiding in the daytime. But David was watching for him and strolled down to meet him.

"Good morning. Your sister says there is no time to lose. Come in here, and we'll see if we can find a way out of this trouble."

Having learned not to expect any response to remarks not absolutely demanding one, and not wishing the silence to dominate, David talked on, as he led Frale into the cabin and carefully closed the door behind them.

Thryng's intuition was subtle and his nature intense and strong. He had been used to dealing with men, and knew that when he wished to, he usually gained his point. Feeling the antagonism in Frale's heart toward himself, he determined to overcome it. Be it pride, jealousy, or what not, it must give way.

He had learned only that morning that circumlocution or pretence of any sort would only drive the youth further into his fortress of silence, and close his nature, a sealed well of turbid feeling, against him; therefore he chose a manner pleasantly frank, taking much for granted, and giving the boy no chance to refuse his help, by assuming it to have been already accepted.

"We are about the same size, I think? Yes. Here are some things I laid out for you. You must look as much like me as possible, and as unlike yourself, you know. Sit here and we'll see what can be done for your head."

"You're right fair, an' I'm dark."

"Oh, that makes very little difference. It's the general appearance we must get at. Suppose I try to trim your hair a little so that lock on your forehead won't give you away."

"I reckon I can do it. Hit's makin' you a heap o' trouble."

David was pleased to note the boy's mood softening, and helped him on.

"I'm no hand as a barber, but I'll try it a little; it's easier for me to get at than for you." He quickly and deftly cut away the falling curl, and even shaved the corners of the forehead a bit, and clipped the eyebrows to give them a different angle. "All this will grow again, you know. You only want it to last until the storm blows over."

The youth surveyed himself in the mirror and smiled, but grimly. "I do look a heap different."

"That's right; we want you to look like quite another man. And now for your chin. You can use a razor; here is warm water and soap. This suit of clothes is such as we tramp about in at home, different from anything you see up here, you know. I'll take my pipe and book and sit there on the rock and keep an eye out, lest any one climb up here to look around, and you can have the cabin all to yourself. You see what to do; make yourself look as if you came from my part of the world." Thryng glanced at his watch. "Work fast, but take time enough to do it well. Say half an hour,— will that do?"

"Yas, I reckon."

Then David left him, and the moments passed until an hour had slipped away, but still the youth did not appear, and he was on the point of calling out to him, when he saw the twisted form of little Hoyle scrambling up through the underbrush.

"They're comin'," he panted, with wild and frightened eyes fixed on David's face. "I see 'em up the road, an' I heered 'em say they was goin' to hunt 'round the house good, an' then s'arch the cabin ovah Hanging Rock." The poor child burst into tears. "Do you 'low they'll shoot Frale, suh?"

"They'd not reached the house when you saw them?"

"They'll be thar by now, suh," sobbed the boy.

"Then run and hide yourself. Crawl under the rock —into the smallest hole you can. They mustn't see that you have been here, and don't be frightened, little man. We'll look after Frale."

The child disappeared like a squirrel in a hole, and Thryng went to the cabin door and knocked imperatively. It was opened instantly, and Frale stood transformed, his old, soiled garments lying in a heap at his side as if he had crept out of his chrysalis. A full half hour he had been lingering, abashed at himself and dreading to appear. The slight growth of adolescence was gone from lip and chin, and Thryng was amazed and satisfied.

"Good," he cried. "You've done well."

The youth smiled shamefacedly, yet held his head high. With the heavy golf stockings, knee breeches, and belted jacket, even to himself he seemed another man, and an older man he looked by five years.

"Now keep your nerve, and square your shoulders and face the world with a straight look in the eye. You've thrown off the old man with these." David touched the heap of clothing on the floor with his foot. "Hoyle is here. He says the men are on their way here and have stopped at the house."

Instead of turning pale as Thryng had expected, a dark flush came into Frale's face, and his hand clinched. It was the ferocity of fear, and not the deadliness of it, which seized him with a sort of terrible anger, that David felt through his silence.

"Don't lose control of yourself, boy," he said, placing his hand gently on his shoulder and making his touch felt by the intimate closing of his slender fingers upon the firmly rounded, lean muscles beneath them.

"Follow my directions, and be quick. Put your own clothes in this bag." He hastily tossed a few things out of his pigskin valise. "Cram them in; that's right. Don't leave a trace of yourself here for them to find. Pull this cap over your eyes, and walk straight down that path, and pass them by as if they were nothing to you. If they speak to you, of course nod to them and pass on. But if they ask you a question, say politely, 'Beg pardon?' just like that, as though you did not understand — and — wait. Don't hurry away from them as if you were afraid of them. They won't recognize you unless you give yourself away by your manner. See? Now say it over after me. Good! Take these cigars." He placed his own case in the boy's vest pocket.

"Better leave 'em free, suh. I don't like to take all your things this-a-way." He handed back the case, and put them loose in his pocket.

"Very well. If you smoke, just light this and walk on, and if they ask you anything about yourself, if you have seen a chap of the sort, understand, offer them each a cigar, and tell them no. Don't say 'I reckon not,' for that will give you away, and don't lift your cap, or they will see how roughly your hair is cut. Touch it as if you were going to lift it, only — so. I would take care not to arrive at the house while they are there; it will be easier for you to meet them on the path. It will be the sooner over."

Thryng held out his hand, and Frale took it awkwardly, then turned away, swallowing the thanks he did not know how to utter. For the time being, David had conquered.

The lad took a few steps and then turned back. "I'd like to thank you, suh, an' I'd like to pay fer these here — I 'low to get work an' send the money fer 'em."

"Don't be troubled about that; we'll see later. Only remember one thing. I don't know what you've done, nor why you must run away like this — I haven't asked. I may be breaking the laws of the land as much as you in helping you off. I am doing it because, until I know of some downright evil in you, I'm bound to help you, and the best way to repay me will be for you to — you know — do right."

"Are you doin' this fer her?" He looked off at the hills as he spoke, and not at the doctor.

"Yes, for her and for you. Don't linger now, and don't forget my directions."

The youth turned on the doctor a quick look. Thryng could not determine, as he thought it over afterward, if there was in it a trace of malevolence. It was like a flash of steel between them, even as they smiled and again bade each other good-by.

For a time all was silent around Hanging Rock. Thryng sat reading and pondering, expecting each moment to hear voices from the direction Frale had taken. He could not help smiling as he thought over his attempt to make this mountain boy into the typical English tourist, and how unique an imitation was the result.

He called out to comfort Hoyle's fearful little heart: "Your brother's all safe now. Come out here until we hear men's voices."

"I better stay whar I be, I reckon. They won't talk none when they get nigh hyar."

"Are you comfortable down there?"

"Yas, suh."

Hoyle was right. The two men detailed for this climb walked in silence, to give no warning of their approach, until they appeared in the rear of the cabin, and entered the shed where Frale's horse was stabled. Sure were they then that its owner was trapped at last.

They were greatly surprised at finding the premises occupied. David continued his reading, unconcerned until addressed.

"Good evenin', suh."

He greeted them genially and invited them into his cabin, determined to treat them with as royal hospitality as was in his power. To offer them tea was hardly the thing, he reasoned, so he stirred up the fire, while descanting on the beauty of the location and the health-giving quality of the air, and when his kettle was boiling, he brought out from his limited stores whiskey, lemons, and sugar, and proceeded to brew them so fine a quality of English toddy as to warm the cockles of their hearts.

Questioning them on his own account, he learned how best to get his supplies brought up the mountains, and many things about the region interesting to him. At last one of them ventured a remark about the horse and how he came by him, at which he explained very frankly that the widow down below had allowed him the use of the animal for his keep until her son returned.

They "'lowed he wa'n't comin' back to these parts very soon," and David expressed satisfaction. His evident ignorance of mountain affairs convinced them that nothing was to be gained from him, and they asked no direct questions, and finally took their departure, with a high opinion of their host, and quite content.

Then David called his little accomplice from his hiding-place, took him into his cabin, and taught him to drink tea with milk and sugar in it, gave him crisp biscuits from his small remainder in store, and, still further to comfort

his heart, searched out a card on which was a picture of an ocean liner on an open sea, with flags flying, great rolls of vapor and smoke trailing across the sky, with white-capped waves beneath and white clouds above. The boy's eyes shone with delight. He twisted himself about to look up in Thryng's face as he questioned him concerning it, and almost forgot Frale in his happiness, as he trudged home hugging the precious card to his bosom.

Contentedly Thryng proceeded to set his abode in order after the disarray of the morning, undisturbed by any question as to the equity of his deed. His mind was in a state of rebellion against the usual workings of the criminal courts, and, biassed by his observation of the youth, he felt that his act might lead as surely toward absolute justice, perhaps more surely, than the opposite course would have done.

Erelong he found a few tools carefully packed away, as was the habit of his old friend, and the labor of preparing his canvas room began. But first a ladder hanging under the eaves of the cabin must be repaired, and long before the slant rays of the setting sun fell across his hilltop, he found himself too weary to descend to the Fall Place, even with the aid of his horse. With a measure of discouragement at his undeniable weakness, he led the animal to water where a spring bubbled sweet and clear in an embowered hollow quite near his cabin, then stretched himself on the couch before the fire, with no other light than its cheerful blaze, too exhausted for his book and disinclined even to prepare his supper.

After a time, David's weariness gave place to a pleasant drowsiness, and he rose, arranged his bed, and replenished the fire, drank a little hot milk, and dropped into a wholesome slumber as dreamless and sweet as that of a tired child.

Such a sense of peace and retirement closed around him there alone on his mountain, that he slept with his cabin door open to the sweet air, crisp and cold, lulled by the murmuring of the swaying pine tops without, and the crackling and crumbling of burning logs within. Rolled in his warm Scotch rug, he did not feel the chill that came as his fire burned lower, but slept until daybreak, when the clear note of a Carolina wren, thrice repeated close to his open door, sounded his reveille.

Deeply inhaling the cold air, he lay and mused over the events of the previous day. How quickly and naturally he had been drawn into the interests of his neighbors below him, and had absorbed the peculiar atmosphere of their isolation, making a place for himself, shutting out almost as if they had never existed the harassments and questionings of his previous life. Was it a buoyancy he had received from his mountain height and the morning air? Whatever the cause, he seemed to have settled with them all, and arrived at last where his spirit needed but to rest open and receptive before its Creator to be swept clear of the dross of the world's estimates of values, and exalted with aspiration.

Every long breath he drew seemed to make his mental vision clearer. God and his own soul — was that all? Not quite. God and the souls of men and of women — of all who came within his environment — a world made beautiful, made sweet and health-giving for these — and with them to know God, to feel Him near. So Christ came to be close to humanity.

A mist of scepticism that had hung over him and clouded the later years of his young manhood suddenly rolled away, dispelled by the splendor of this triumphant thought, even as the rays of the rising sun came at the same moment to dispel the earth mists and flood the hills with light. Light; that was it! "In Him is no darkness at all."

Joyously he set himself to the preparation for the day. The true meaning of life was revealed to him. The discouragement of the evening before was gone. Yet now should he sit down in ecstatic dreaming? It must be joy in life — movement — in whatever was to be done, whether in satisfying a wholesome hunger, in creating warmth for his body, or in conquering the seeds of decay and disease therein, and keeping it strong and full of reactive power for his soul's sake.

It was a revelation to him of the eternal God, wonder-working and all-pervading. Now no longer with a haunting sense of fear would he search and learn, but with a glad perception of the beautiful orderliness of the universe, so planned and arranged for the souls of men when only they should learn how to use their own lives, and

attune themselves to give forth music to the touch of the God of Love.

A cold bath, the pure air, and his abstemiousness of the previous evening gave him a compelling hunger, and it was with satisfaction he discovered so large a portion of his dinner of yesterday remaining to be warmed for his morning meal. What he should do later, when dinner-time arrived, he knew not, and he laughed to think how he was living from hour to hour, content as the small wren fluting beside his door his care-free note. Ah, yes! "God's in His heaven, all's right with the world."

The wren's note reminded him of a slender box which always accompanied his wanderings, and which had come to light rolled in the jacket which he had given Frale as part of his disguise. He opened it and took therefrom the joints of a silver flute. How long it had lain untouched!

He fitted the parts and strolled out to the rock, and there, as he gazed at the shifting, subtle beauty spread all before him and around him, he lifted the wandlike instrument to his lips and began to play. At first he only imitated the wren, a few short notes joyously uttered; then, as the springs of his own happiness welled up within him, he poured forth a tumultuous flood of trills — a dancing staccato of mounting notes, shifting and falling, rising, floating away, and then returning in silvery echoes, bringing their own gladness with them.

The pæan of praise ended, the work of the day began, and he set himself with all the nervous energy of his nature to the finishing of his canvas room. Again, ere the completion of the task, he found he had been expending his strength too lavishly, but this time he accepted his weariness more philosophically, glad if only he might labor and rest as the need came.

Nearly the whole of the glorious day was still left him. In moving his couch nearer the door, he found his efforts impeded by some heavy object underneath it, and discovered, to his surprise and almost dismay, the identical pigskin valise which Frale had taken away with him the day before. How came it there? No one, he was certain, had been near his cabin since Hoyle had trotted home yesterday, hugging his picture to his breast.

David drew it out into the light and opened it. There

on the top lay the cigars he had placed in the youth's pocket, and there also every article of wearing apparel he had seen disappear down the laurel-grown path on Frale's lithe body twelve hours or more ago. He cast the articles out upon the floor and turned them over wonderingly, then shoved them aside and lay down for his quiet siesta. He would learn from Cassandra the meaning of this. He hoped the young man had got off safely, yet the fact of finding his kindly efforts thus thrust back upon him disturbed him. Why had it been done? As he pondered thereon, he saw again the steel-blue flash in the young man's eyes as he turned away, and resolved to ask no questions, even of Cassandra.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH FRALE GOES DOWN TO FARINGTON IN HIS OWN WAY

Frale felt himself exalted by the oath he had sworn to Cassandra, as if those words had lifted the burden from his heart, and taken away the stain. As he walked away in his disguise, it seemed to him that he had acted under an irresistible spell cast upon him by this Englishman, who was to bide so near Cassandra — to be seen by her every day — to be admired by her, while he, who had the first right, must hide himself away from her, shielding himself in that man's clothes. Fine as they seemed to him, they only abashed him and filled him with a sense of obligation to a man he dreaded.

Like a child, realizing his danger only when it was close upon him, his old recklessness returned, and he moved down the path with his head held high, looking neither to the right nor to the left, planning how he might be rid of these clothes and evade his pursuers unaided. The men, climbing toward him as he descended, hearing his footsteps above them, parted and stood watching, only half screened by the thick-leaved shrubs, not ten feet from him on either side; but so elated was he, and eager in his plans, that he passed them by, unseeing, and thus Thryng's efforts saved him in spite of himself; for so amazed were they at the presence of such a traveller in such a place that they allowed him to pass unchallenged until he was too far below them to make speech possible. Later, when they found David seated on his rock, they assumed the young man to be a friend, and thought no further of it.

Frale soon left the path and followed the stream to the head of the fall, where he lingered, tormented by his own thoughts and filled with conflicting emotions, in sight of his home.

To go down to the settlement and see the world had its allurements, but to go in this way, never to return, never

to feel again the excitement of his mountain life, evading the law and conquering its harassments, was bitter. It had been his joy and delight in life to feel himself masterfully triumphant over those set to take him, too cunning to be found, too daring and strong to be overcome, to take desperate chances and win out; all these he considered his right and part of the game of life. But to slink away like a hunted fox followed by the dogs of the law because, in a blind frenzy, he had slain his own friend! What if he had promised to repent; there was the law after him still!

If only his fate were a tangible thing, to be grappled with! To meet a foe and fight hand to hand to the death was not so hard as to yield himself to the inevitable. Sullenly he sat with his head in his hands, and life seemed to stretch before him, leading to a black chasm. But one ray of light was there to follow — "Cass, Cass." If only he would accept the help offered him and go to the station, take his seat in the train, and find himself in Farington, while still his pursuers were scouring the mountains for him, he might — he might win out. Moodily and stubbornly he resisted the thought.

At last, screened by the darkness, he turned out his soiled and torn garments, and divesting himself of every article Thryng had given him, he placed them carefully in the valise. Then, relieved of one humiliation, he set himself again on the path toward Hanging Rock cabin.

As he passed the great holly tree where Cassandra had sat beside him, he placed his hand on the stone and paused. His heart leaned toward her. He wanted her. Should he go down to her now and refuse to leave her? But no. He had promised. Something warm splashed down upon his hand as he bent over the rock. He sprang up, ashamed to weep, and, seizing the doctor's valise, plunged on through the shadows up the steep ascent.

He had no definite idea of how he would explain his act, for he did not comprehend his own motives. It was only a wordless repugnance that possessed him, vague and sullen, against this man's offered friendship; and his relief was great when he found David asleep before his open door.

Stealthily he entered and placed his burden beneath

the couch, gazed a moment at the sleeping face whereon the firelight still played, and softly crept away. Cassandra should know that she had no need to thank the Englishman for his freedom.

Then came the weary tramp down the mountain, skulking and hiding by day, and struggling on again by night — taking by-paths and unused trails — finding his uncertain way by moonlight and starlight — barked at by dogs, and followed by hounds baying loudly whenever he came near a human habitation — wading icy streams and plunging through gorges to avoid cabins or settlements — keeping life in him by gnawing raw turnips which had been left in the fields ungathered, until at last, pallid, weary, dirty, and utterly forlorn, he found himself, in the half-light of the dawn of the fourth day, near Farington. Shivering with cold, he stole along the village street and hid himself in the bishop's grounds until he should see some one astir in the house.

The bishop had sat late the night before, half expecting him, for he had received Cassandra's letter, also one from Thryng. Neither letter threw light on Frale's deed, although Cassandra's gave him to understand that something more serious than illicit distilling had necessitated his flight. David's was a joyous letter, craving his companionship whenever his affairs might bring him near, but expressing the greatest contentment.

When Black Carrie went out to unlock the chicken house door and fetch wood for her morning fire, she screamed with fright as the young man in his wretched plight stepped before her.

"G'long, yo — pore white trash!" she cried.

"I'm no poor white trash," he murmured. "Be Bishop Towah in the house?"

"Co'se he in de haouse. Whar yo s'poses he be dis time de mawnin'?" She made with all haste toward her kitchen, bearing her armful of wood, muttering as she went.

"I reckon I'll set hyar ontwell he kin see me," he said, dropping to the doorstep in sheer exhaustion. And there he was allowed to sit while she prepared breakfast in her own leisurely way, having no intention of disturbing her "white folkses fer no sech trash."

The odor of coffee and hot cakes was maddening to the

starving boy, as he watched her through the open door, yet he passively sat, withdrawn into himself, seeking in no way either to secure a portion of the food or to make himself known. After a time, he heard faintly voices beyond the kitchen, and knew the family must be there at breakfast, but still he sat, saying nothing.

At last the door of the inner room was burst open, and a child ran out, demanding scraps for her puppy.

"I may! I may, too, feed him in the dining room. Mamma says I may, after we're through."

"Go off, honey chile, mussin' de flo' like dat-a-way fer me to clean up agin. Naw, honey. Go out on de stoop wif yer fool houn' dog." And the tiny, fair girl with her plate of scraps and her small black dog leaping and dancing at her heels, tumbled themselves out where Frale sat.

Scattering her crusts as she ran, she darted back, calling: "Papa, papa! A man's come. He's here." The small dog further emphasized the fact by barking fiercely at the intruder, albeit from a safe distance.

"Yas," said Carrie, as the bishop came out, led by his little daughter, "he b'en hyar sence long fo' sun-up."

"Why didn't you call me?" he said sternly.

"Sho — how I know anybody wan' see yo, hangin' 'roun' de back do'? He ain' say nuthin', jes' set dar." She continued muttering her crusty dislike of tramps, as the bishop led his caller through her kitchen and sent his little daughter to look after her puppy.

He took Frale into his private study, and presently returned and himself carried him food, placing it before him on a small table where many a hungry caller had been fed before. Then he occupied himself at his desk while he quietly observed the boy. He saw that the youth was too worn and weak to be dealt with rationally at first, and he felt it difficult to affix the thought of a desperate crime upon one so gentle of mien and innocent of face; but he knew his people well, and what masterful passions often slept beneath a mild and harmless exterior.

Nor was it the first time he had been called upon to adjust a conflict between his own conscience and the law. Often in his office of priest he had been the recipient of confidences which no human pressure of law could ever

wrest from him. So now he proceeded to draw from Frale his full and free confession.

Very carefully and lovingly he trespassed in the secret chambers of this troubled soul, until at last the boy laid bare his heart.

He told of the cause of his anger and his drunken quarrel, of his evasion of his pursuers and his vow with Cassandra before God, of his rejection of Doctor Thryng's help and his flight by night, of his suffering and hunger. All was told without fervor, — a simple passive narration of events. No one could believe, while listening to him, that storms of passion and hatred and fear had torn him, or the overwhelming longing he had suffered at the thought of Cassandra.

But when the bishop touched on the subject of repentance, the hidden force was revealed. It was as if the tormenting spirit within him had cried out loudly, instead of the low, monotonous tone in which he said: —

"Yas, I kin repent now he's dade, but ef he war livin' an' riled me agin that-a-way like he done — I reckon — I reckon God don't want no repentin' like I repents."

It was steel against flint, the spark in the narrow blue line of his eyes as he said the words, and the bishop understood.

But what to do with this man of the mountains — this force of nature in the wild; how guard him from a far more pernicious element in the civilized town life than any he would find in his rugged solitudes?

And Cassandra! The bishop bowed his head and sat with the tips of his fingers pressed together. The thought of Cassandra weighed heavily upon him. She had given her promise, with the devotion of her kind, to save; had truly offered herself a living sacrifice. All hopes for her growth into the gracious womanhood her inheritance impelled her toward, — her sweet ambitions for study, gone to the winds — scattered like the fragrant wild rose petals on her own hillside — doomed by that promise to live as her mother had lived, and like other women of her kin, to age before her time with the bearing of children in the midst of toil too heavy for her — dispirited by privation and the sorrow of relinquished hopes. Oh, well the bishop knew!

He dreaded most to see the beautiful light of aspiration die out of her eyes, and her spirit grow sordid in the life to which this untamed savage would inevitably bring her. "What a waste!"

And again he repeated the words, "What a waste!" The youth looked up, thinking himself addressed, but the bishop saw only the girl. It was as if she rose and stood there, dominant in the sweet power of her girlish self-sacrifice, appealing to him to help save this soul. Somehow, at the moment, he failed to appreciate the beauty of such giving. Almost it seemed to him a pity Frale had thus far succeeded in evading his pursuers. It would have saved her in spite of herself had he been taken.

But now the situation was forced upon the bishop, either to give him up, which seemed an arbitrary taking into his own hands of power which belonged only to the Almighty, or to shield him as best he might, giving heed to the thought that even if in his eyes the value of the girl was immeasurably the greater, yet the youth also was valued, or why was he here?

He lifted his head and saw Frale's eyes fixed upon him sadly — almost as if he knew the bishop's thoughts. Yes, here was a soul worth while. Plainly there was but one course to pursue, and but one thread left to hold the young man to steadfast purpose. Using that thread, he would try. If he could be made to sacrifice for Cassandra some of his physical joy of life, seeking to give more than to appropriate to himself for his own satisfaction — if he could teach him the value of what she had done — could he rise to such a height, and learn self-control?

The argument for repentance having come back to him void, the bishop began again. "You tell me Cassandra has given you her promise? What are you going to do about it?"

"Hit's 'twixt her an' me," said the youth proudly.

"No," thundered the bishop, all the man in him roused to beat into this crude, triumphant animal some sense of what Cassandra had really done. "No. It's betwixt you and the God who made you. You have to answer to God for what you do." He towered above him, and bending down, looked into Frale's eyes until the boy cowered and looked down, with lowered head, and there was silence.

Then the bishop straightened himself and began pacing the room. At last he came to a stand and spoke quietly. "You have Cassandra's promise; what are you going to do about it?"

Frale did not move or speak, and the bishop felt baffled. What was going on under that passive mask he dared not think. To talk seemed futile, like hammering upon a flint wall; but hammer he must, and again he tried.

"You have taken a man's life; do you know what that means?"

"Hangin', I reckon."

"If it were only to hang, boy, it might be better for Cassandra. Think about it. If I help you, and shield you here, what are you going to do? What do you care most for in all this world? You who can kill a man and then not repent."

"He hadn't ought to have riled me like he done; I — keer fer her."

"More than for Frale Farwell?"

The boy looked vaguely before him. "I reckon," was all he said.

Again the bishop paced the floor, and waited.

"I hain't afeared to work — right hard."

"Good; what kind of work can you do?" Frale flushed a dark red and was silent. "Yes, I know you can make corn whiskey, but that is the devil's work. You're not to work for him any more."

Again silence. At last, in a low voice, he ventured: "I'll do any kind o' work you-all gin' me to do — ef — ef only the officers will leave me be — an' I tol' Cass I'd larn writin'."

"Good, very good. Can you drive a horse? Yes, of course."

Frale's eyes shone. "I reckon."

The bishop grew more hopeful. The holy greed for souls fell upon him. The young man must be guarded and watched; he must be washed and clothed, as well as fed, and right here the little wife must be consulted. He went out, leaving the youth to himself, and sought his brown-eyed, sweet-faced little wisp of a woman, where she sat writing his most pressing business letters for him.

"Dearest, may I interrupt you?"

"In a minute, James; in a minute. I'll just address these."

He dropped into a deep chair and waited, with troubled eyes regarding her. "There!" She rubbed vigorously down on the blotter. "These are all done, every blessed one, James. Now what?"

In an instant she was curled up, feet and all, like a kitten in his lap, her small brown head, its wisps of fine, straight hair straying over temples and rounded cheeks, tucked comfortably under his chin; and thus every point was carefully talked over.

With many exclamations of anxiety and doubt, and much discreet suggestion from the small adviser, it was at last settled. Frale was to be properly clothed from the missionary boxes sent every year from the North. He should stay with them for a while until a suitable place could be found for him. Above all things he must be kept out of bad company.

"Oh, dear! Poor Cassandra! After all her hopes — and she might have done so much for her people — if only —" Tears stood in the brown eyes and even ran over and dropped upon the bishop's coat and had to be carefully wiped off, for, as he feelingly remarked, —

"I can't go about wearing my wife's tears in plain view, now, can I?"

And then Doctor Hoyle's young friend — she must hear his letter. How interesting he must be! Couldn't they have him down? And when the bishop next went up the mountain, might she accompany him? Oh, no. The trip was not too rough. It was quite possible for her. She would go to see Cassandra and the old mother. "Poor Cassandra!"

But the self-respecting old stepmother and her daughter did not allow these kind friends to trespass on any missionary supplies, for Uncle Jerry was despatched down the mountain with a bundle on the back of his saddle, which was quietly left at the bishop's door; and Frale next appeared in a neat suit of homespun, home woven and dyed, and home-made clothing.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH DAVID THRYNG MAKES A DISCOVERY

STANDING on the great hanging rock before his cabin, Thryng imagined himself absolutely solitary in the centre of a wide wilderness. Even the Fall Place, where lived the Widow Farwell, although so near, was not visible from this point; but when he began exploring the region about him, now on foot and now on horseback, he discovered it to be really a country of homes.

Every mule path branching off into what seemed an inaccessible wild led to some cabin, often set in a hollow on a few acres of rich soil, watered by a never failing spring, where the forest growth had been cut away to make cultivation possible. Sometimes the little log house would be perched like a lonely eagle's nest on a mere shelflike ledge jutting out from the mountain wall, but always below it or above it or off at one side he found the inevitable pocket of rich soil accumulated by the wash of years, where enough corn and cow-peas could be raised for cattle, and cotton and a few sheep to provide material for clothing the family, with a few fowls and pigs to provide their food.

Here they lived, those isolated people, in quiet independence and contented poverty, craving little and often having less, caring nothing for the great world outside their own environment, looking after each other in times of sickness and trouble, keeping alive the traditions of their forefathers, and clinging to the ancient family feuds and friendships from generation to generation.

David soon learned that they had among themselves their class distinctions, certain among them holding their heads high, in the knowledge of having a self-respecting ancestry, and training their children to reckon themselves no "common trash," however much they deprecated showing the pride that was in them.

Many days passed after Frale's departure before David learned more of the young man's unhappy deed. He had gone down to give the old mother some necessary care and,

finding her alone, remained to talk with her. Pleased with her quaint expressions and virile intellect, he led her on to speak of her youth; and one morning, weary of the solitude and silence, she poured out tales of Cassandra's father, and how, after his death, she "came to marry Farwell." She told of her own mother, and the hard times that fell upon them during the bitter days of the Civil War.

The traditions of her family were dear to her, and she was well pleased to show this young doctor who had found the key to her warm, yet reserved, heart that she "wa'n't no common trash," and her "chillen wa'n't like the run o' chillen."

"Seems like I'm talkin' a heap too much o' we-uns," she said, at last.

"No, no. Go on. You say you had no school; how did you learn? You were reading your Bible when I came in."

"No. Thar wa'n't no schools in my day, not nigh enough fer me to go to. Maw, she could read, an' write, too, but aftah paw jined the ahmy, she had to work right ha'd and had nothin' to do with. Paw, he had to jine one side or t'othah. Some went with the North and some went with the South, — they didn't keer much. The' wa'n't no niggahs up here to fight ovah. But them war cruel times when the bushwackers come searchin' 'round an' raidin' our homes. They were a bad lot — most of 'em war desertahs from both ahmies. We-uns war obleeged to hide in the bresh or up the branch — anywhar we could find a place to creep into. Them were bad times fer the women an' chillen left at home.

"Maw used to save ev'y scrap of papah she could find with printin' on hit to larn we-uns our lettahs off'n. One time come 'long a right decent captain and axed maw could she get he an' his men suthin' to eat. He had nigh about a dozen sogers with him; an' maw, she done the bes' she could, — cooked corn-bread, an' chick'n an' sich. I c'n remember how he sot right on the hearth where you're settin' now, an' tossed flapjacks fer th' hull crowd.

"He war right civil when he lef', an' said he'd like to give maw suthin', but they hadn't nothin' but Confed'rate money, an' hit wa'n't worth nothin' up here; an' maw said would he give her the newspapah he had. She seed the

end of hit standin' out of his pocket; an' he laughed and give hit out quick, an' axed her what did she want with hit; and she 'lowed she could teach me a heap o' readin' out o' that papah, an' he laughed again, an' said likely, fer that hit war worth more'n the money. All the schoolin' I had war just that thar papah, an' that old spellin'-book you see on the shelf; I c'n remembah how maw come by that, too."

"Tell me how she came by the spelling-book, will you?"

"Hit war about that time. Paw, he nevah come home again. I cyan't remembah much 'bouts my paw. Maw used to say a heap o' times if she only had a spellin'-book like she used to larn out'n, 'at she could larn we-uns right smart. Well, one day one o' the neighbors told her 'at he'd seed one at Gerret's, ovah t'othah side Lone Pine Creek, nigh about eight mile, I reckon; an' she 'lowed she'd get hit. So she sont we-uns ovah to Teasley's mill — she war that scared o' the Gorillas she didn't like leavin' we-uns home alone — an' she walked thar an' axed could she do suthin' to earn that thar book; an' ol' Miz Gerret, she 'lowed if maw'd come Monday follerin' an' wash fer her, 'at she mount have hit. Them days we-uns an' the Teasleys war right friendly. The' wa'n't no feud 'twixt we-uns an' Teasleys then — but now I reckon thar's bound to be blood feud." She spoke very sadly and waited, leaving the tale of the spelling-book half told.

"Why must there be 'blood feud' now? Why can't you go on in the old way?"

"Hit's Frale done hit. He an' Ferd'nan' Teasley, they set up 'stillin' ovah in Dark Cornder yandah. Hit do work a heap o' trouble, that thar. I reckon you-uns don't have nothin' sich whar you come from?"

"We have things quite as bad. So they quarrelled, did they?"

"Yaas, they quarrelled, an' they fit."

"No doubt they had been drinking."

"Yas, I reckon."

"But just a drunken quarrel between those two ought not to affect all the rest. Couldn't you patch it up among you, and keep the boy at home? You must need his help on the place."

"We need him bad here, but the' is no way fer to make up an' right a blood feud. Frale done them mean. He

lifted his hand an' killed his friend. Hit war Sunday evenin' he done hit. They had been havin' a singin' thar at the mill, an' preachah, he war thar too, an' all war kind an' peaceable; an' Ferd an' Frale, they sot out fer thar 'still' — Ferd on foot an' Frale rid'n' his horse — the one you have now — they used to go that-a-way, rid'n' turn about — one horse with them an' one horse kep' alluz hid nigh the 'still' lest the gov'nment men come on 'em suddent like. Frale, he war right cute, he nevah war come up with.

" 'Pears like they stopped 'fore they'd gone fer, disputin' 'bouts somethin'. Ol' Miz Teasley say she heered ther voices high an' loud, an' then she heered a shot right quick, that-a-way, an' nothin' more; an' she sont ol' man Teasley an' the preachah out, an' the hull houseful follered, an' thar they found Ferd lyin' shot dade — an' Frale — he an' the horse war gone. Ferd, he still held his own gun in his hand tight, like he war goin' to shoot, with the triggah open an' his fingah on hit — but he nevah got the chance. Likely if he had, hit would have been him a-hidin' now, an' Frale dade. I reckon so."

Thryng listened in silence. It made him think of the old tales of the Scottish border. So, in plain words, the young man was a murderer. With deep pity he recalled the haunted look in Frale's eyes, and the sadness that trembled around Cassandra's lips as she said, "I reckon there is no trouble worse than ours." A thought struck him, and he asked: —

"Do you know what they quarrelled about?"

"He nevah let on what-all was the fuss. Likely he told Cass, but she is that still. Hit's right hard to raise a blood feud thar when we-uns an' the Teasleys alluz war friends. She took keer o' me when my chillen come, an' I took keer o' her with hern. Ferd'nan' too, he war like my own, fer I nursed him when she had the fever an' her milk lef' her. Cass war only three weeks old then, an' he war nigh on a year, but that little an' sickly — he like to 'a' died if I hadn't took him." She paused and wiped away a tear that trickled down the furrow of her thin cheek. "If hit war lef' to us women fer to stir 'em up, I reckon thar wouldn't be no feuds, fer hit's hard on we-uns when we're friendly, an' Ferd like my own boy that-a-way."

"But perhaps —" David spoke musingly — "perhaps

it was a woman who stirred up the trouble between them."

The widow looked a moment with startled glance into his face, then turned her gaze away. "I reckon not. The' is no woman far or near as I evah heern o' Frale goin' with."

Still pondering, David rose to go, but quickly resumed his seat, and turned her thoughts again to the past. He would not leave her thus sad at heart.

"Won't you finish telling me about the spelling-book?"

"I forget how come hit, but maw didn't leave we chillen to Teasleys' that day she went to do the washin'. Likely Miz Teasley war sick — anyway she lef' us here. She baked corn-bread — hit war all we had in the house to eat them days, an' she fotched water fer the day, an' kivered up the fire. Then she locked the door an' took the key with her, an' tol' we-uns did we hear a noise like anybody tryin' to get in, to go up garret an' make out like thar wa'n't nobody to home. The' war three o' us chillen. I war the oldest. We war Caswells, my fam'ly. My little brothah Whitson, he war sca'cely more'n a baby, runnin' 'round pullin' things down on his hade whar he could reach, an' Cotton war mos' as much keer — that reckless."

She paused and smiled as she recalled the cares of her childhood, then wandered on in her slow narration. "They done a heap o' things that day to about drive me plumb crazy, an' all the time we was thinkin' we heered men talkin' or horses trompin' outside, an' kep' ourselves right busy runnin' up garret to hide.

"Along towa'ds night hit come on to snow, an' then turned to rain, a right cold hard rain, an' we war that cold an' hungry — an' Whit, he cried fer maw, — an' hit come dark an' we had et all the' war to eat long before, so we had no suppah, an' the poor leetle fellers war that cold an' shiverin' thar in the dark — I made 'em climb into bed like they war, an' kivered 'em up good, an' thar I lay tryin' to make out like I war maw, gettin' my arms 'round both of 'em to oncet. Whit cried hisself to sleep, but Cotton he kep' sayin' he heered men knockin' 'round outside, an' at last he fell asleep, too. He alluz war a natch'ly skeered kind o' child.

"Then I lay thar still, list'nin' to the rain beat on the

roof, an' thinkin' would maw ever get back again, an' list'nin' to hear her workin' with the lock — hit war a padlock on the outside — an' thar I must o' drapped off to sleep that-a-way, fer I didn't hear nothin', no more until I woke up with a soft murmurin' sound in my ears, an' thar I seed maw. The rain had stopped an' hit war mos' day, I reckon, with a mornin' moon shinin' in an' fallin' on her whar she knelt by the bed, clost nigh to me. I can see hit now, that long line o' white light streamin' acrost the floor an' fallin' on her, makin' her look like a white ghost spirit, an' her two hands held up with that thar book 'twixt 'em.

"I knew hit war maw, fer I'd seed her pray before, but I war skeered fer all that. I lay right still an' held my breath, an' heered her thank the Lord fer keerin' fer we-uns whilst she war gone, an' fer 'lowin' her to get that thar book.

"I don't guess she knew I seed her, fer she got up right still an' soft, like not to wake we-uns, an' began to light the fire an' make some yarb tea. She war that wet an' cold I could see her hand shake whilst she held the match to the light'ud stick. Them days maw made coffee out'n burnt corn-bread, an' tea out'n dried blackberry leaves an' sassafrax root." She paused and turned her face toward the open door. David thought she had lost somewhat the appearance of age; certainly, what with the long rest, and Cassandra's loving care, she had no longer the weary, haggard look that had struck him when he saw her first.

Following the direction of her gaze, he went to the shelf and took down the old spelling-book, and turned the leaves, now limp and worn. So this was Cassandra's inheritance — part of it — the inward impulse that would urge to toil all day, then walk miles in rain and darkness through a wilderness, and thank the Lord for the privilege — to own this book — not for herself, but for the generations to come. David touched it reverently, glad to know so much of her past, and turned to the old mother for more.

"Have you anything else — like this?"

Her sharp eyes sparkled as she looked narrowly at him. "I have suthin' 'at I hain't nevah told anybody livin' a word of, not even Doctah Hoyle — only he war some differ'nt from you. But I'm gettin' old, an' I may as well tell you. Likely with all your larnin' you can tell me is it

any good to Cass. She be that sot on all sech.' She fumbled at her throat a moment and drew from the bosom of her gown a leather shoe-lacing, from which dangled an iron key. Slowly she undid the knot, and handed it toward him.

"I nevah 'low nobody on earth to touch that thar box, an' the' ain't a soul livin' knows what's in hit. I been gyardin' them like they war gold, fer they belonged to my ol' man — the first one — Cassandra's fathah; but I reckon if I die the' won't nobody see any good in them things. If you'll onlock that thar padlock on that box yander, you'll find it wropped in a piece o' gingham. My paw's mothah spun an' wove that gingham — ol' Miz Caswell. They don't many do work like that nowadays. They lived right whar we a' livin' now."

David unlocked the chest and lifted the heavy lid.

"Hit's down in the further cornder — that's hit, I reckon. Just step to the door, will you, an' see is they anybody nigh."

He went to the door, but saw no one; only from the shed came an intermittent rat-tat-tat.

"I don't see any one, but I hear some one pounding."

"Hit's only Hoyle makin' his traps." She sighed, then slowly and tenderly untied the parcel and placed in his hands two small leather-bound books. Tied to one by a faded silk cord which marked the pages was a thin, worn ring of gold.

"That ring war his maw's, an' when we war married, I wore hit, but when I took Farwell fer my ol' man, I nevah wore hit any more, fer he 'lowed, bein' hit war gold that-a-way, we'd ought to sell hit. That time I took the lock off'n the door an' put hit on that thar box. Hit war my gran'maw's box, an' I done wore the key hyar evah since. Can you tell what they be? Hit's the quarest kind of print I evah see. He used to make out like he could read hit. Likely he did, fer whatevah he said, he done."

It seemed to her little short of a miracle that any one could read it, but David soon learned that her confidence in her first "old man" was unlimited.

"What-all's in hit?" She grew restless while he carefully and silently examined her treasure, the true significance of which she so little knew. Filled with amaze-

ment and with a keen pleasure, he took the books to the light. The print was fine, even, and clear.

"What-all be they?" she reiterated. "Reckon the're no good?"

David smiled. "In one way they're all the good in the world, but not for money, you know."

"No, I don't guess. Can you read that thar quare printin'?"

"Yes. The letters are Greek, and these books are about a hundred years old."

"Be they? Then they won't be much good to Cass, I reckon. He sot a heap by them, but I war 'feared they mount be heathen. Greek — that thar be heathen. Hain't hit?"

David continued, speaking more to himself than to her. "They were published in London in eighteen twelve. They have been read by some one who knew them well, I can see by these marginal notes."

"What be they?" Her curiosity was eager and intent.

"They are explanations and comments, written here on the margin — see? — with a fine pen."

"His grandpaw done that thar. What be they about, anyhow?"

"They are very old poems written long before this country was discovered."

"An' that must 'a' been before the Revolution. His grandpaw fit in that. The' is somethin' more in thar. I kept hit hid, fer Farwell, he war bound to melt hit up fer silver bullets. He 'lowed them bullets war plumb sure to kill. Reckon you can find hit? Thar 'tis." Her eyes shone as Thryng drew out another object also wrapped in gingham. "Hit's a teapot, I guess, but Farwell, he got a-hold of hit an' melted off the spout to make his silvah bullets. That time I hid all in the box an' put on the bolt an' lock whilst he war away 'stillin'. The' is one bullet left, but I reckon Frale has hit."

David took it from her hand and turned it about. "Surely! This is a treasure. Here is a coat of arms — but it is so worn I can't make out the emblem. Was this your husband's also? Is there anything else?"

"That's all. Yes, they war hisn. I war plumb mad at Farwell. I nevah could get ovah what he done, all so't he

mount sure kill somebody. Likely he meant them bullets fer the revenue officers, should they come up with him."

"It would have been a great pity if he had destroyed this mark. I think — I'm not sure — but if it's what I imagine, it is from an old family in Wales."

"I reckon you're right, fer they were Welsh — his paw's folks way back. He used to say the' wa'n't no name older'n hisn since the Bible. I told him 'twar time he got a new one if 'twere that old, but he said he reckoned a name war like whiskey — hit needed a right smart o' age to make hit worth anything."

Thryng laid the antique silver pot on the bed beside the old mother's hand and again took up the small volumes. As he held them, a thought flashed through his mind, yet hardly a thought, — it was more of an illumination, — like a vista suddenly opened through what had seemed an impenetrable, impalpable wall, beyond which lay a joy yet to be, but before unseen. In that instant of time, a vision appeared to him of what life might bring, glorified by a tender light as of red fire seen through a sweet, blue, obscuring mist, and making thus a halo about the one figure of the vision outlined against it, clear and fine.

"'Pears like you find somethin' right interestin' in that book; be you readin' hit?"

"I find a glorious prophecy. Was your first husband born and raised here as you were?"

"Not on this spot; but he was born an' raised like we-uns here in the mountains — ovah th'other side Pisgah. I seed him first when I wa'n't more'n seventeen. He come here fer — I don't rightly recollect what, only he had been deer huntin' an' come late evenin' he drapped in. He had lost his dog, an' he had a bag o' birds, an' he axed maw could she cook 'em an' give him suppah, an' maw, she took to him right smaht.

"Aftah suppah — I remember like hit war last evenin' — he took gran'paw's old fiddle an' tuned hit up an' sot thar an' played everything you evah heered. He played like the' war birds singin' an' rain fallin', an' like the wind when hit goes wailin' round the house in the pine tops — soft an' sad — like that-a-way. Gran'paw's old fiddle. I used to keer a heap fer hit, but one time Farwell got religion, an' he took an' broke hit 'cause he war 'feared

Frale mount larn to play an' hit would be a temptation of the devil to him."

"Well, I say! That was a crime, you know."

"Yes. Sometimes I lay here an' say what-all did I marry Farwell fer, anyway. Well — every man has his failin's, the' say, an' Farwell, he sure had hisn."

"May I keep these books a short time? I will be very careful of them. You know that, or you would not have shown them to me."

"You take them as long as you like. Hit ain't like hit used to be. Books is easy come by these days — too easy, I reckon. Cassandry, she brung a whole basketful of 'em with her. Thar they be on that cheer behin' my spinnin'-wheel."

"Was the basket full of books? So, that was why it was so heavy. Might I have a look at them?"

"Look 'em ovah all you want to. She won't keer, I reckon. She hain't had a mite o' time since she come home to look at 'em."

But David thought better of it. He would not look in her basket and pry among her treasures without her permission.

"When is she coming back?" he asked, awakened to desire further knowledge of the silent girl's aspirations.

"Soon, I reckon. She's been a right smart spell longah now 'n she 'lowed she'd be. Hit's old man Irwin. He's been hurted some way. She went ovah to see could Aunt Sally Carew go an' help Miz Irwin keer fer him — she's a fool thing, don't know nothin'. They sont down fer me — but here I be, so she rode the colt ovah fer Sally."

David wrapped and tied the piece of silver as he had found it. As he replaced it in the box, he discovered the pieces of the broken fiddle loosely tied in a sack, precious relics of a joy that was past. Carefully he locked the box and returned the key, but the books he folded in the strip of gingham and carried away with him.

"I'll be back to-night or in the morning. If she doesn't return, send Hoyle for me. You mustn't be too long alone. Shall I mend the fire?"

He threw on another log, then lifted her a little and brought her a glass of cool water, and climbed back to his cabin, walking lightly and swiftly.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH DAVID ACCOMPANIES CASSANDRA ON AN ERRAND OF MERCY

FILLED with the enthusiasm of his thoughts, David climbed too rapidly, and now he found he must take the more gradual rise of the mule trail without haste. His cap thrust in his pocket, the breeze lifted his hair and dried the perspiration which would still come with any too eager exertion. But why should he care? Even to be alive these days was joy. This was continually the refrain of his heart, nor had he begun to exhaust his resources for entertainment in his solitary life.

Never were the days too long. Each was filled with such new and lively interest as to preclude the thought of ennui. To provide against it, he had sent for books — more than he had had time to read in all the busy days of the last three years. These and his microscope and his surgical instruments had been brought him on a mule team by Jerry Carew, who did his "toting" for him, fetching all he needed for work or comfort, in this way, from the nearest station where goods could be sent until the hotel opened in the early summer. Not that he needed them, but that, as an artist loves to keep a supply of paints and canvas, or a writer — even when idle — is happier to know that he has at hand plenty of pens and blank paper, he liked to have them.

Thus far he had felt no more need of his books than he had for his surgical instruments, but now he was glad he had them for the sake of the girl who was "that sot on all such." He would open the box the moment he had eaten, and look them over. The little brother should take them down to her one at a time — or better — he would take them himself and watch the smile which came so rarely and sweetly to play about her lips, and in her eyes, and vanish. Surely he had a right to that for his pains.

He heard the sound of rapid hoof beats approaching across the level space from the cabin above him, and look-

ing up, as if conjured from his innermost thought, he saw her coming, allowing the colt to swing along as he would. Her bonnet hung by the strings from her arm, her hair blew in crinkling wisps across her face, and the rapid exercise had brought roses into the creamy whiteness of her skin. She kept to the brow of the ridge and would have passed him unseeing, her eyes fixed on the distant hills, had he not called to her in his clear Alpine jodel.

She reined in sharply and, slipping from the saddle, walked quickly to him, leading the colt, which was warm and panting as if he had carried her a good distance at that pace.

"Oh, Doctor Thryng, we need you right bad. That's why I took this way home. Have you been to the house?"

"Yes. I have just come from there."

"Is mother all right?"

"Doing splendidly." He waited, and she lifted her face to him anxiously.

"We need you bad, Doctor."

"Yes — but not you — you're not —" he began stupidly.

"It's Mr. Irwin. I went there to see could I help any, and seemed like I couldn't get here soon enough. When I found you were not at home, I was that troubled. Can — can you go up there and see why I can't rest for thinking he's a heap worse than he reckons? He thinks he's better, but — but —"

"Come in and rest and tell me about it."

"Mistress Irwin isn't quite well, and I must go back as soon as I can get everything done at home. I must get dinner for mother and Hoyle. You have been that kind to mother — I thought — I thought — if you could only see him — they can't spare him to die."

"Indeed, I'll go, gladly. But you must tell me more, so that I may know what to take with me. What is the matter with the man? Is he ill or hurt? Let me — oh, you are an independent young woman."

She had turned from him to mount, and he stepped forward with outstretched hand to aid her, but, in a breath, not seeing his offer, she placed her two hands on the horn of the saddle, and from the slight rise of ground whereon

she stood, with one agile spring, landed easily in the saddle and wheeled about.

"He's been cutting trees to clear a patch for corn, and some way he hurt his foot, and he's been lying there nigh a week with the misery. Last evening she sent one of the children for mother, not knowing she was bad herself, so I went for Aunt Sally; but she was gone, so I rode on to the Irwins to see could I help. He said he wasn't suffering so much to-day, and it made my heart just stop to hear that, when he couldn't lift himself. You see, my stepfather — he — he was shot in the arm, and right soon when the misery left him, he died, so I didn't say much — but on the way home I thought of you, and I came here fast. We know so little here on the mountains," she added sadly, as she looked earnestly down at him.

"You have acted wisely. Just ride on, Miss Cassandra, and I will follow as soon as —"

"Come down with me now and have dinnah at our place. Then we can start togethah."

"Thank you, I will. You are more expert in the art of dinner getting than I am, so we will lose less time." He laughed and was rewarded with the flash of a grateful smile as she started on without another word.

It took David but a few minutes to select what articles he suspected, from her account, might be required. He hurried his preparations, and, being his own groom, stable boy, and man-of-all-work, he was very busy about it.

As a strain of music or a floating melody will linger in the background with insistent repetition, while the brain is at the same time busily occupied with surface affairs, so he found himself repeating some of her quaint phrases, and seeing her eyes — the wisps of wind-blown hair — and the smile on her lips, as she turned away, like an accompaniment to all he was thinking and doing.

Soon, equipped for whatever the emergency might demand, he was at the widow's door. His horse nickered and stretched out his nose toward Cassandra's colt as if glad to have once more a little horse companionship. Side by side they stood, with bridles slipped back and hung to their saddles, while they crunched contentedly at the corn on the ear, which Hoyle had brought them.

While at dinner, Cassandra showed David her books,

pleased that he asked to see them. "I brought them to study, should I get time. It's right hard to give up hope —" she glanced at her mother and lowered her voice. "To stop — anyhow — I thought I might teach Hoyle a little."

"Ah, these are mostly school-books," he said, glancing them over.

"Yes, I was at school this time — near Farington it was. Once I stayed with Bishop Towahs and helped do housework. I could learn a heap there — between times. They let me have all the books I wanted to read." She looked lovingly at her few precious school-books. "I haven't touched these since I got back — we're that busy."

Then she resumed her work about the house, cooking at the fireplace, waiting upon David, and serving her mother, while directing Hoyle what to do, should she be detained that night. He demurred and hung about her, begging her not to stay.

"I won't, son, without I can't help it. You won't care so much now — mother's not bad like she was."

"Yas, I will," he mourned.

"I reckon I'll have to call you 'baby' again," said his mother. "You're gettin' that babyfied since Cass come back doin' all fer ye. You has a heap o' company. Thar's the cow to keer fer, 'n' ol' Pete hollerin' at ye, an' the chickens tellin' how many aigs they've laid fer ye. Run now. Thar's ol' Frizzle cacklin'. Get the aig, an' we'll send hit to the pore sick man. Thar, Cass," she added, as Hoyle ran out, half ashamed, to do her bidding — "hit's your own fault fer makin' such a baby of him. I 'low you betteh take 'long a few fresh aigs; likely they'll need 'em, so triflin' they be. I don't guess you'll find a thing in the house fer him to eat."

Cassandra packed one of her oddly shaped little baskets, as her mother suggested, for the sadly demoralized and distracted family to which they were going, and tucked in with the rest the warm, newly laid egg Hoyle brought her, smiling indulgently, and kissing his upturned face as she took it from him.

Toward David she was always entirely simple and natural, except when abashed by his speech, which seemed

to her most elaborate and sometimes mystifying. She would pause and gaze on him an instant when he extended to her a courtesy, as if to give it its exact value. Not that she in the least distrusted him, quite the contrary, but that she was wholly unused to hearing phrased courtesies, or enthusiasms expressed in the form of words.

She had seen something of it in the bishop's pretty complimentary pleasantries with his wife, but David's manner of handing her a chair, offering her a suggestion — with a "May I be allowed?" was foreign to her, and she accepted such remarks with a moment's hesitation and a certain aloofness hardly understood by him.

He found himself treating her with a measure of freedom from the constraint which men often place upon themselves because of the recognition of the personal element which will obtrude between them and femininity in general. He recognized the reason for this in her absolute lack of coquetry toward him, but analyze the phenomenon, as yet, he could not.

To her he was a being from another world, strange and delightful, but set as far from her as if the sea divided them. She turned toward him sweet, expectant eyes. She listened attentively, gropingly sometimes. She would understand him if she could, — would learn from him and trust him implicitly, — but her femininity never obtruded itself. Her personality seemed to be enclosed within herself and never to lean toward him with the subtile flattery men feel and like to awaken, but which they often fear to arouse when they wish to remain themselves unstirred. Her dignified poise and perfect freedom from all arts to attract his favor and attention pleased him, but while it gave him the safe and unconstrained feeling when with her, it still piqued his man's nature a little to see her so capable of showing tenderness to her own, yet so unstirred by himself.

Cassandra had never been up to his cabin when he was there, until to-day, since the morning she came to consult him about Frale, nor had that young man's name been uttered between them. David had said nothing to her of the return of the valise, not wishing to touch on the subject unless she gave the opportunity for him to ask what she knew about it. Now, since his morning's talk with her

mother had envisioned an ideal, and shown a glory beyond, he was glad to have this opportunity of being alone with her and of sounding her depths.

For a long time they rode in silence, and he remembered her mother's words, "He may have told Cass, but she is that still." She carried her basket carefully before her on the pommel of her saddle. Gradually the large sunbonnet which quite hid her face slipped back, and the sun lighted the bronze tints of her hair. As he rode at her side he studied her watchfully, so simply dressed in homespun material which had faded from its original color to a sort of turquoise green. The stuff was heavy and clung closely to her figure, and she rode easily, perched on her small, old-fashioned side-saddle, swaying with lithe movement to the motion of her horse. She wore no wrap, only a soft silk kerchief knotted about her neck, the fluttering ends of which caressed her chin.

Her cheeks became rosy with the exercise, and her gray eyes, under the green pines and among the dense laurel thickets, took on a warm, luminous green tint like the hue of her dress. David at last found it difficult to keep his eyes from her,—this veritable flower of the wilderness,—and all this time no word had been spoken between them. How impersonal and far away from him she seemed! While he was filled with interest in her and eager to learn the secret springs of her life, she was riding on and on, swaying to her horse as a flower on its slender stem sways in a breeze, as undisturbed by him as if she were not a human breathing girl, subject to man's dominating power.

Was she, then, so utterly untouched by his masculine presence? he wondered. If he did not speak first, would she keep silent forever? Should he wait and see? Should he will her to speak and of herself unfold to him?

Suddenly she turned and looked clearly and pleasantly in his eyes. "We'll be on a straight road for a piece after this hill; shall we hurry a little then?"

"Certainly, if you think best. You set the pace, and I'll follow." Again silence fell.

"Do you feel in a hurry?" he asked at length.

"I would like to get there soon. We can't tell what might be." She pressed her hand an instant to her throat and drew in her breath as if something hurt her.

"What is it?" he asked, drawing his horse nearer.

"Nothing. Only I wish we were there now."

"You are suffering in anticipation, and it isn't necessary. Better not, indeed. Think of something else."

"Yes, suh." The two little words sounded humbly submissive. He had never been so baffled in an endeavor to bring another soul into a mood responsive to his own. This gentle acquiescence was not what he wished, but that she should reveal herself and betray to him even a hint — a gleam — of the deep undercurrent of her life.

Suddenly they emerged on the crest of a narrow ridge from which they could see off over range after range of mountain peaks on one side, growing dimmer, bluer, and more evanescent until lost in a heavenly distance, and on the other side a valley dropping down and down into a deep and purple gloom richly wooded and dense, surrounded by precipices topped with scrubby, wind-blown pines and oaks — a wild and rocky descent into mystery and seclusion. Here and there a slender thread of smoke, intensely blue, rose circling and filtering through the purple density against a black-green background of hemlocks.

Contrasted with the view on the other side, so celestially fair, this seemed to present something sinister, yet weirdly beautiful — a baffling, untamed wilderness. Along this ridge the road ran straight before them for a distance, stony and bleak, and the air swept over it sweet and strong from the sea, far away.

"Wait — wait a moment," he called, as his panting horse rounded the last curve of the climb, and she had already put her own to a gallop. She reined in sharply and came back to him, a glowing vision. "Stand a moment near me. We'll let our horses rest a bit and ourselves, too. There is strength and vitality in this air; breathe it in deeply. What joy to be alive!"

She came near, and their horses held quiet communion, putting their noses together contentedly. Cassandra lifted her head high and turned her face toward the billowed mountains, and did what Thryng had not known her to do, what he had wondered if she ever did — She laughed — laughed aloud and joyously.

"Why do you laugh?" he asked, and laughed with her.

"I'm that glad all at once. I don't know why. If the

mountains could feel and be glad, seems like they'd be laughing now away off there by the sea. I wonder will I ever see the ocean."

"Of course you will. You are not going to live always shut up in these mountains. Laugh again. Let me hear you."

But she turned on him startled eyes. "I clean forgot that poor man down below, so like to die I am 'most afraid to get back there. Look down. It must have been in a place like that where Christian slew Apollyon in the dark valley, like I was reading to Hoyle last night."

"Does he live down in there? I mean the man Irwin — not Apollyon. He's dead, for Christian slew him."

"Yes, the Irwins live there. See yonder that spot of cleared red ground? There's their place. The house is hid by the dark trees nigh the red spot. Can you make it out?"

"Yes, but I call that far."

"It's easy riding. Shall we go on? I'm that frightened — we'd better hurry."

"Is that your way when you are afraid to do a thing; you hurry to do it all the more?"

"Seems like we have to a heap of times. Seems like if I were only a man, I could be brave, but being a girl so, it is right hard."

She started her horse to a gallop, and side by side they hurried over the level top of the ridge — to Thryng an exhilarating moment, to her a speeding toward some terrible, unknown trial.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH CASSANDRA AND DAVID VISIT THE HOME OF DECATUR IRWIN

Soon the way became steep and difficult and the path so narrow they were forced to go single file. Then Cassandra led and David followed. They passed no dwellings, and even the little home to which they were going was lost to view. He wondered if she were not weary, remembering that she had been over the distance twice before that day, and begged her, as he had done when they set out, to allow him to carry the basket, but still she would not.

"I never think of it. I often carry things this way. —We have to here in the mountains." She glanced back at him and smiled. "I reckon you find it hard because you are not used to living like we do; we're soon there now, see yonder?"

A turn in the path brought them in sight of the cabin, set in its bare, desolate patch of red soil. About the door swarmed unkempt children of all sizes, as bees hang out of an over-filled hive, the largest not more than twelve years old, and the youngest carried on the mother's arm. It was David's first visit to one of the poorest of the mountain homes, and he surveyed the scene before him with dismay.

Below the house was a spring, and there, suspended from the long-reaching branch of a huge beech tree, now leafless and bare, a great, black iron pot swung by a chain over a fire built on the ground among a heap of stones. On a board at one side lay wet, gray garments, twisted in knots as they had been wrung out of the soapy water. The woman had been washing, and the vapor was rising from the black pot of boiling suds, but, seeing their approach, she had gone to her door, her babe on her arm and the other children trooping at her heels and clinging to her skirts. They peered up from under frowzy, over-

hanging locks of hair like a group of ragged, bedraggled Scotch terriers.

The mother herself seemed scarcely older than the oldest, and Thryng regarded her with amazement when he noticed her infantile, undeveloped face and learned that she had brought into the world all those who clustered about her. His amazement grew as he entered the dark little cabin and saw that they must all eat and sleep in its one small room, which they seemed to fill to overflowing as they crowded in after him, accompanied by three lean hounds, who sniffed suspiciously at his leggings.

Far in the darkest corner lay the father on a pallet of corn-husks covered with soiled bedclothing. The windows were mere holes in the walls, unglazed, unframed, and closed at night or in bad weather by wooden shutters, when the room was lighted only by the flames from the now black and empty fireplace. Here, while mother and children were out by "the branch" washing, the injured man lay alone, stoically patient, declaring that his "laig" was some better, that he did not feel "so much misery in hit as yesterday."

Thryng had seen much squalor and wretchedness, but never before in a home in the country where women and children were to be found. For a moment he looked helplessly at the silent, staring group, and at the man, who feebly tried to indicate to his wife the extending of some courtesy to the stranger.

"Set a cheer, Polly," he said weakly, offering his great hand. "You are right welcome, suh. Are you visitin' these parts?"

"This is the doctor I was telling you about, Cate,—Doctor Thryng. I begged him to come up and see could he do anything for you," said Cassandra. Then she urged the woman to go back to her work and take the children with her. "Doctor and I will look after your old man awhile." She succeeded in clearing the place of all but one lean hound, who continued to stand by his master and lick his hand, whining presciently, and one or two of the children, who lingered around the door to peer in curiously at the doctor.

A shutter near the bed was tightly closed and, in struggling to open it, Cassandra discovered it was broken at the

hinges and had been nailed in place. David flew to her assistance and, wrenching out the nails, tore it free, letting in a flood of light upon the wretchedness around them. Then he turned his attention to the patient, a man of powerful frame, but lean almost to emaciation, who watched the young physician's face silently with widely opened blue eyes, their pale color intensified by the surrounding shock of matted, curling, vividly red hair and beard.

It required but a few moments to ascertain that the man's condition was indeed critical. Cassandra had gone out and now returned with her hands full of dry pine sticks. Bending on one knee before the empty fireplace, she arranged them and hung a kettle over them full of fresh water. David turned and watched her light the fire.

"Good. We shall need hot water immediately. How long since you have eaten?" he asked the man.

"He hain't eat nothing all day," said the wife, who had returned and again stood in the door with all her flock, gazing at him. Then the woman grew plaintively garrulous about the trouble she had had "doin' fer him," and begged David to tell her "could he he'p 'im." At last Thryng put a hurried end to her talk by saying he could do nothing — nothing at all for her old man, unless she took herself and the children all away. She looked terror-stricken, and her mouth drew together in a stubborn, resentful line as if in some way he had precipitated ill luck upon them by his coming. Cassandra at once took her basket and walked out toward the stream, and they all followed, leaving David and the father in sole possession of the place.

Then he turned to the bed and began a kindly explanation. He found the man more intelligent and much more tractable than the woman, but it was hard to make him believe that he must inevitably lose either his life or his foot, and that they had not an hour — not a half hour — to spare, but must decide at once. David's manner, gentle, but firmly urgent, at last succeeded. The big man broke down and wept weakly, but yielded; only he stipulated that his wife must not be told.

"No, no! She and the children must be kept away;

but I need help. Is there no one — no man whom we can get to come here quickly?"

"They is nobody — naw — I reckon not."

David was distressed, but he searched about until he found an old battered pail in which to prepare his antiseptic, and busied himself in replenishing the fire and boiling the water; all the time his every move was watched by the hound and the pathetic blue eyes of his master.

Soon Cassandra returned, to David's great relief, alone. She smiled as she looked in his face, and spoke quietly: "I told her to take the children and gather dock and mullein leaves and such like to make tea for her old man, and if she'd stay awhile, I'd look after him and have supper for them when they got back. Is there anything I can do now?"

David was troubled indeed, but what could he do? He explained his need of her quickly, in low tones, outside the door. "I believe you are strong and brave and can do it as well as a man, but I hate to ask it of you. There is not time to wait. It must be done to-day, now."

"I'll help you," she said simply, and walked into the hut. She had become deadly pale, and he followed her and placed his fingers on her pulse, holding her hand and looking down in her eyes.

"You trust me?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. I must."

"Yes — you must — dear child. You are all right. Don't be troubled, but just think we are trying to save his life. Look at me now, and take in all I say."

Then he placed her with her back to his work, taught her how to count the man's pulse and to give the ether; but the patient demurred. He would not take it.

"Naw, I kin stand hit. Go ahead, Doctor."

"See here, Cate Irwin. You are bound to do as Doctor Thryng says or die," she said, bending over him. "Take this, and I'll sit by you every minute and never take my hand off yours. Stop tossing. There!" He obeyed her, and she sat rigidly still and waited.

The moments passed in absolute silence. Her heart pounded in her breast and she grew cold, but never took her eyes from the still, deathlike face before her. In her heart she was praying — praying to be strong enough

to endure the horror of it — not to faint nor fall — until at last it seemed to her that she had turned to stone in her place; but all the time she could feel the faintly beating pulse beneath her fingers, and kept repeating David's words: "We are trying to save his life — we are trying to save his life."

David finished. Moving rapidly about, he washed, covered, and carried away, and set all in order so that nothing betrayed his grewsome task. Then he came to her and took both her cold hands in his warm ones and led her to the door. She swayed and walked weakly. He supported her with his arm and, once out in the sweet air, she quickly recovered. He praised her warmly, eagerly, taking her hands in his, and for the first time, as the faint rose crept into her cheeks, he felt her to be moved by his words; but she only smiled as she drew her hands away and turned toward the house.

"They'll be back directly, and I promised to have something for them to eat."

"Then I'll help you, for our man is coming out all right now, and I feel — if he can have any kind of care — he will live."

The sky had become overcast with heavy clouds and the wind had risen, blowing cold from the north. David replaced the shutter he had torn off and mended the fire with fuel he found scattered about the yard; while Cassandra swept and set the place in order and the resuscitated patient looked about a room neater and more homelike than he had ever slept in before. Cassandra searched out a few articles with which to prepare a meal — the usual food of the mountain poor — salt pork, and corn-meal mixed with water and salt and baked in the ashes. David watched her as she moved about the dark cabin, lighted only by the fitful flames of the fireplace, to perform those gracious, homely tasks, and would have helped her, but he could not.

At last the woman and her brood came streaming in, and Cassandra and the doctor were glad to escape into the outer air. He tried to make the mother understand his directions as to the care of her husband, but her passive "Yas, suh" did not reassure him that his wishes would be carried out, and his hopes for the man's recovery

grew less as he realized the conditions of the home. After riding a short distance, he turned to Cassandra.

"Won't you go back and make her understand that he is to be left absolutely alone? Scare her into making the children keep away from his bed, and not climb into it. You made him do as I wished, with only a word, and maybe you can do something with her. I can't."

She turned back, and David watched her at the door talking with the woman, who came out to her and handed her a bundle of something tied in a meal sack. He wondered what it might be, and Cassandra explained.

"These are the yarbs I sent her and the children aftah. I didn't know how to rid the cabin of them without I sent for something, and now I don't know what to do with these. We — we're obliged to use them some way." She hesitated — "I reckon I didn't do right telling her that — do you guess? I had to make out like you needed them and had sent back for them; it — it wouldn't do to mad her — not one of her sort." Her head drooped with shame and she added pleadingly, "Mother has used these plants for making tea for sick folks — but — "

He rode to her side and lifted the unwieldy load to his own horse, "Be ye wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove," he said, laughing.

"How do you mean?"

"You were wise. You did right where I would only have done harm and been brutal. Can't you see these have already served their purpose?"

"I don't understand."

"You told her to get them because you wished to make her think she was doing something for her husband, didn't you? And you couldn't say to her that she would help most by taking herself out of the way, could you? She could not understand, and so they have served their purpose as a means of getting her quietly and harmlessly away so we could properly do our work."

"But I didn't say so — not rightly; I made her think — "

"Never mind what you said or made her think. You did right, God knows. We are all made to work out good — often when we think erroneously, just as you made her uncomprehendingly do what she ought. If

ever she grows wise enough to understand, well and good; if not, no harm is done."

Cassandra listened, but doubtingly. At last she stopped her horse. "If you can't use them, I feel like I ought to go back and explain," she said. Her face gleamed whitely out of the gathering dusk, and he saw her shiver in the cold and bitter wind. He was more warmly dressed than she, and still he felt it cut through him icily.

"No. You shall not go back one step. It would be a useless waste of your time and strength. Later, if you still feel that you must, you can explain. Come."

She yielded, touched her horse lightly with her whip, and they hurried on. The night was rapidly closing in, the thick, dark shadows creeping up from the gorges below as they climbed the rugged steep they had descended three hours earlier. They picked their way in silence, she ahead, and he following closely. He wondered what might be her thoughts, and if she had inherited, along with much else that he could perceive, the Puritan conscience which had possibly driven some ancestor here to live undisturbed of his precious scruples.

When they emerged at last on the level ridge where she had so joyously laughed out, Thryng hurried forward and again rode at her side. She sat wearily now, holding the reins with chilled hands. Had she forgotten the happy moment? He had not. The wind blew more shrewdly past them, and a few drops of rain, large and icy cold, struck their faces.

"Put these on your hands, please," he begged, pulling off his thick gloves; but she would not.

He reached for the bridle of her horse and drew him nearer, then caught her cold hands and began chafing them, first one and then the other. Then he slipped the warm gloves over them. "Wear them a little while to please me," he urged. "You have no coat, and mine is thick and warm."

Suddenly he became aware that she was and had been silently weeping, and he was filled with anxiety for her, so brave she had been, so tired she must be — worn out — poor little heart!

"Are you so tired?" he asked

"Oh, no, no."

"Won't you tell me what troubles you? Let me put this over your shoulders to keep off the rain."

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, as he began to remove his coat. "You need it a heap more than I. You have been sick, and I am well."

"Please wear it. I will walk a little to keep warm."

"Oh! I can't. I'm not cold, Doctor Thryng. It isn't that."

He became imperative through anxiety. "Then tell me what it is," he said.

"I can't stop thinking of Decatur Irwin. I can feel you working there yet, and seems like I never will forget. I keep going over it and over it and can't stop. Doctor, are you sure — sure — it was right for us to do what we did?"

"Poor child! It was terrible for you, and you were fine, you know — fine; you are a heroine — you are —"

"I don't care for me. It isn't me. Was it right, Doctor? Was there no other way?" she wailed.

"As far as human knowledge goes, there was no other way. Listen, Miss Cassandra, I have been where such accidents were frequent. Many a man's leg have I taken off. Surgery is my work in life — don't be horrified. I chose it because I wished to be a saver of life and a helper of my fellows." She was shivering more from the nervous reaction than from the cold, and to David it seemed as if she were trying to draw farther away from him.

"Don't shrink from me. There are so many in the world to kill and wound, some there must be to mend where it is possible. I saw in a moment that your intuition had led you rightly, and soon I knew what must be done; I only hope we were not too late. Don't cry, Miss Cassandra. It makes me feel such a brute to have put you through it."

"No, no. You were right kind and good. I'm only crying now because I can't stop."

"There, there, child! We'll ride a little faster. I must get you home and do something for you." He spoke out of the tenderness of his heart toward her.

But soon they were again descending, and the horses, careful for their own safety if not for their riders', continued slowly and stumblingly to pick their footing in the darkness.

Now the rain began to beat more fiercely, and before they reached the Fall Place they were wet to the skin.

David feared neither the wetting nor the cold for himself; only for her in her utter weariness was he anxious. She would help him stable the horses and led away one while he led the other, but once in the house he took matters in his own hands peremptorily. He rebuilt the fire and himself removed her wet garments and her shoes. She was too exhausted to resist. Following the old mother's directions, he found woollen blankets and, wrapping her about, he took her up like a baby and laid her on her bed. Then he brewed her a hot milk punch and made her take it.

"You need this more than I, Doctah. If you'll just take some yourself, as soon as I can I'll make your bed in the loom shed again, and —"

"Drink it; drink it and go to sleep. Yes, yes. I'll have some, too."

"Cass, you lie still and do as doctah says. You nigh about dade, child. If only I could get off'n this bed an' walk a leetle, I'd 'a' had your place all ready fer ye, Doctah. The' is a featheh bade up garret, if ye could tote hit down an' drap on the floor here fer —"

David laughed cheerily. "Why, this is nothing for me." He stood turning himself about to dry his clothing on all sides before the blaze. "As soon as Miss Cassandra closes her eyes and sleeps, I will look after myself. It's a shame to bring all these wet things in here, I say!"

"You are a-steamin' like you are a steam engine," piped little Hoyle, peering at him over his mother's shoulder from the far corner of her bed.

"You lie down and go to sleep again, youngster," said David.

And gradually they all fell asleep, while Thryng sat long before the fire and pondered until Cassandra slept. Once and again a deep quivering sigh trembled through her parted lips, as he watched beside her. A warm rose hue played over her still features, cast by the dancing red flames, and her hair in a dishevelled mass swept across the pillow and down to the floor. At last the rain ceased; warmed and dried, Thryng stole away from the silent house and rode back to his own cabin.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH SPRING COMES TO THE MOUNTAINS, AND CASSANDRA TELLS DAVID OF HER FATHER

ERE long such a spring as David had never dreamed of swept up the mountain, with a charm so surpassing and transcending any imagined beauty that he was filled with a sort of ecstasy. He was constantly out upon the hills revelling in the lavish bounty of earth and sky, of rushing waters, and all the subtile changes in growing things, as if at last he had been clasped to the heart of nature. He visited the cabins wherever he was called, and when there was need for Cassandra's ministrations he often took her with him; thus they fell naturally into good camaraderie. Thus, also, quite as naturally, Cassandra's speech became more correct and fluent, even while it lost none of its lingering delicacy of intonation.

David provided her with books, as he had promised himself. Sometimes he brought them down to her, and they read together; sometimes he left them with her and she read them by herself eagerly and happily; but so busy was she that she found very little time to be with him. Not only did all the work of the household fall on her, but the weaving, which her mother had done heretofore, and the care of the animals, which had been done by Fralę.

The life she had hoped to lead and the good she had longed to do when she left home for school, encouraged by the bishop and his wife, she now resolutely put away from her, determined to lead in the best way the life that she knew must henceforth be hers. She hoped at least she might be able to bring the home place back to what it used to be in her Grandfather Caswell's time, and to this end she labored patiently, albeit sadly.

David was ever aware of a barrier past which he might never step, no matter how merry or how intimate they might seem to be, and always about her a silent air of waiting, which deterred him in his efforts to draw her

into more confidential relations. Yet as the days passed, he became more interested in her, influenced by her nearness to him, and still more by her remoteness.

Allured and baffled, often in the early morning or late evening he would sit in the doorway of his cabin, or out on his rock with his flute, when his thoughts were full of her. Simple, maidenly, and strong, his heart yearned toward her, while instinctively she held herself aloof in quiet dignity. Never had she presented herself at his door unless impelled by necessity. Never had she sat with him in his cabin since that first time when she came to him so heavy hearted for Frale.

Only when she knew him to be absent had she gone to his cabin and set all its disorder to rights. Then he would return to find it swept and cleaned, and sweet with wild flowers and pine greenery and vines, his cooking utensils washed and scoured, the floor whitened with scrubbing, in his larder newly baked corn-bread and white beaten biscuits, his honey jar refilled and fresh butter pats in the spring. Sometimes a brown, earthen jug of cool, refreshing buttermilk stood on his table, but always his thanks would be swept aside with the words: —

"Mother sent me up to see could I do anything for you. You are always that kind and we can't do much."

"And you never come up when I am at home?"

"It isn't every time I can get to go up, I'm that busy here most days."

"Only the days when I am absent can you 'get to go up'?" he would say teasingly. "Don't I ever deserve a visit?"

"Cass don't get time fer visitin' these days. Since Frale lef' she have all his work an' hern too on her, an' mine too, only the leetle help she gets out'n Hoyle, an' hit hain't much," said the mother. "Doctah, don't ye guess I can get up an' try walkin' a leetle?"

"If you will promise me you will only try it when I am here to help you, I will take off the weight, and we'll see what you can do to-day."

Cassandra loved to watch David attend on her mother, so tender was he; and he adopted a playful manner that always dispelled her pessimism and left her smiling and talkative. Ere he was aware, also, he made a place for

himself in Cassandra's heart when he became interested in the case of her little brother, and attempted gradually to overcome his deformity.

Every morning when the child climbed to his eyrie and brought his supply of milk, David took him in and gently, out of his knowledge and skill, gave him systematic care, and taught him how to help himself; but he soon saw that a more strenuous course would be the only way to bring permanent relief, or surely the trouble would increase.

"What did Doctor Hoyle say about it?" he asked one day.

"He wa'n't that-a-way when doctah war here last. Hit war nigh on five year ago that come on him. He had fevah, an' a right smart o' times when we thought he war a-gettin' bettah he jes' went back, ontwell he began to kind o' draw sideways this-a-way, an' he hain't nevah been straight sence, an' he has been that sickly, too. When doctah saw him last, he war nigh three year old an' straight as they make 'em, an' fat — you couldn't see a bone in him."

David pondered a moment. "Suppose you give him to me awhile," he said. "Let him live with me in my cabin — eat there, sleep there — everything, and we'll see what can be done for him."

"I'm willin', more'n willin', when only I can get to help Cass some. Hoyle, he's a heap o' help, with me not able to do a lick. He can milk nigh as well as she can, an' tote in water, an' feed the chick'ns an' th' pig, an' rid'n' to mill fer meal — yas, he's a heap o' help. Cass, she got to get on with th' weavin'. We promised bed kivers an' such fer Miss Mayhew. She sells 'em fer ladies 'at comes to the hotel in summah. We nevah would have a cent o' money in hand these days 'thout that, only what chick'ns 'nd aigs she can raise fer the hotel, too. Hit's only in summah. I don't rightly see how we can spare Hoyle."

"Where's Miss Cassandra now?" he asked, only more determined on his course the more he was hampered by circumstances.

"She's in the loom shed weavin'. I throwed on the warp fer a blue and white bed kiver 'fore I war hurt, an' she hain't had time to more'n half finish hit. I war helpin'

to get the weavin' done whilst she war at school this winter, an' come spring she war 'lowin' to come back an' help Frale with the plantin' an' makin' crap fer next year. Here in the mountains we-uns have to be forehanded, an' here I be an' can't crawl scarcely yet."

After the thrifty soul had taken a few steps, instead of realizing her good fortune in being able to take any, she was bitterly disappointed to find that weeks must still pass ere she could walk by herself. She was seated on her little porch where David had helped her, looking out on the growing things and the blossoming spring all about — a sight to make the heart glad; but she saw only that the time was passing, and it would soon be too late to make a crop that year.

She was such a neat, self-respecting old woman as she sat there. Her work-worn old hands were not idle, for she turned and mended Hoyle's funny little trousers, home-made, with suspenders attached.

"I don't know what-all we can do ef we can't make a crap. We won't have no corn nor nothin', an' nothin' to feed stock, let alone we-uns. We'll be in a fix just like all the poor white trash, me not able to do a lick."

David came and sat beside her a few moments and said a great many comforting things, and when he rose to go the world had taken on a new aspect for her eyes — bright, dark eyes, looking up at him with a gleam of hope.

"I believe ye," she said. "We'll do anything you say, Doctah."

Thryng walked out past the loom shed and paused to look in on the young girl as she sat swaying rhythmically, throwing the shuttles with a sweep of her arm, and drawing the great beam toward her with steady beat, driving the threads in place, and shifting the veil of warp stretched before her with a sure touch of her feet upon the treadles, all her lithe body intent and atune. It seemed to him as he sat himself on the step to watch, that music must come from the flow of her action. The noise of the loom prevented her hearing his approach, and silently he watched and waited, fascinated in seeing the fabric grow under her hand.

As silently she worked on, and slowly, even as the pattern took shape and became plain before her, his thoughts

grew and took definite shape also, until he became filled with a set purpose. He would not disturb her now nor make her look around. It was enough just to watch her in her sweet serious unconsciousness, with the flush of exercise on her cheeks as he could see when she slightly turned her head with every throw of the shuttle.

When at last she rose, he saw a look of care and weariness on her face that disturbed him. He sprang up and came to her. She little dreamed how long he had been there.

"Please don't go. Stay here and talk to me a moment. Your mother is all right; I have just been with her. May I examine what you have been doing? It is very interesting to me, you know." He made her show him all the manner of her work and drew her on to tell him of the different patterns her mother had learned from her grandmother and had taught her.

"They don't do much on the hand-looms now in the mountains, but Miss Mayhew at the hotel last summer — I told you about her — sold some of mother's work up North, and I promised more, but I'm afraid — I don't guess I can get it all done now."

"You are tired. Sit here on the step awhile with me and rest. I want to talk to you a little, and I want you alone." She looked hesitatingly toward the declining sun. He took her hand and led her to the door. "Can't you give me a few, a very few moments? You hold me off and won't let me say what I often have in mind to ask you." She sat beside him where he placed her and looked wonderingly into his face, but not in the least as if she feared what his question might be, or as if she suspected anything personal. "You know it's not right that this sort of thing should go on indefinitely?"

"I don't know what sort of thing you mean." She lifted grave, wide eyes to his — those clear gray eyes — and his heart admonished him that he had begun to love to look into their blue and green depths, but heed the admonishment he would not.

"I mean working day in and day out, as you do. You have grown much thinner since I saw you first, and look at your hands." He took one of them in his and gently stroked it. "See how thin they are, and here are callous

places. And you are stooping over with weariness, and, except when you have been exercising, your face is far too white."

She looked off toward the mountain top and slowly drew her hand from his. "I must do it. There is no one else," she said in a low voice.

"But it can't go on always — this way."

"I reckon so. Once I thought — it might — be some different, but now —" She waited an instant in silence.

"But now — what?"

"It seems as if it must go on — like this way — always, as if I were chained here with iron."

"But why? Won't you tell me so I may help you?"

"I can't," she said sadly and with finality. "It must be."

He brooded a moment, clasping his hands about one knee and gazing at her. "Maybe," he said at last, "maybe I can help you, even if you can't tell me what is holding you."

She smiled a faintly fleeting smile. "Thank you — but I reckon not."

"Miss Cassandra, when you know I am at your service, and will do anything you ask of me, why do you hold something back from me? I can understand, and I may have ways —"

"It's just that, suh. Even if I could tell you, I don't guess you could understand. Even if I went yonder on the mountain and cried to heaven to set me free, I'd have to bide here and do the work that is mine to do, as mother has done hers, and her mother before her."

"But they did it contentedly and happily — because they wished it. Your mother married your father because she loved him, and was glad —"

"Yes, I reckon she did — but he was different. She could do it for him. He lived alone — alone. Mother knew he did — she could understand. It was like he had a room to himself high up on the mountain, where she never could climb, nor open the door."

David leaned toward her. "What do you see when you look off at the mountain like that?"

"It's like I could see him. He would take his little books up there and walk the high path. I never have showed

you his path. It was his, and he would walk in it, up and down, up and down, and read words I couldn't understand, reading like he was singing. Sometimes I would climb up to him, and he'd take me in his arms and carry me like I was a baby, and read. Sometimes he would sit on a bank of moss under those trees — see near the top by that open spot of sky a right dark place? There are no other trees like them. They are his trees. He would sit with me there and tell me the stories of the strange words; but we never told mother, for she said they were heathen and I mustn't give heed to him." When deeply absorbed, she often lapsed into her old speech. David liked it. He almost wished she would never change it for his. "After father died I hunted and hunted for those little books, but I never could find them."

"You remember him so well, won't you tell me how he looked?"

She slowly brought her eyes down from the mountain top and fixed them on his face. "Sometimes — just for a minute — you make me think of him — but you don't look like him. I never heard any one laugh like he could laugh — and with his eyes, too. He was tall like you, and he carried his shoulders high like you do when you hurry, but he was a dark man. When he stood here in the door of the loom shed, his head touched the top. I thought of it when you stood here a bit ago and had to stoop. He always did that." She lifted her gaze again to the mountain, and was silent.

"Tell me a little more? Just a little? Don't you remember anything he said?"

"He used to preach, but I was too little to remember what he said. They used to have preaching in the schoolhouse, and in winter he used to teach there — when he could get the children to come. They had no books, but he marked with charcoal where they could all see, and showed them writing and figures; but somehow they got the idea he didn't know religion right, and they wouldn't go to hear him any more. Mother says it nigh broke his heart, for he fell to ailing and grew that thin and white he couldn't climb to his path any more." She stopped and put her hand to her throat, as her way was. She too had grown white with the ache of sorrowful remem-

brance. He thought it cruel to urge her, but felt impelled to ask for more.

"And then?"

"Yes. One day we were all alone sitting right here in the loom shed door. He put one hand on my head, and then he put the other hand under my chin and turned my face to look in his eyes — so great and far — like they could see through your heart. Seems like I can feel the touch of his hand here yet and hear him say: 'Little daughter, never be like the rest. Be separate, and God will send for you some day here on the mountain. He will send for you on the mountain top. He will compass you about and lift you up and you shall be blessed.' Then he kissed me and went into the house. I could hear him still saying it as he walked, 'On the mountain top one will come for you, on the mountain top.' He went in and lay down, and I sat here and waited. It seemed like my heart stood still waiting for him to come back to me, and it must have been more than an hour I sat, and mother came home and went in and found him gone. He never spoke again. He lay there dead."

She paused and drew in a long, sighing breath. "I have never said those words aloud until now, to you, but hundreds of times when I look up on the mountain I have said them in my heart. I reckon he meant I was to bide here until my time was come, and do all like I ought to do it. I did think I could go to school and learn and come back and teach like he used to, and so keep myself separate like he did, but the Lord called me back and laid a hard thing on me, and I must do it. But in my heart I can keep separate like father did."

She rose and stood calmly, her eyes fixed on the mountain. David stood near and longed to touch her passive hand — to lift it to his lips — but forebore to startle her soul by so unusual an act. For all she had given him a confidence she had never bestowed on another, he felt himself held aloof, her spirit withdrawn from him and lifted to the mountain top.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH CASSANDRA HEARS THE VOICES, AND DAVID LEASES A FARM

THAT evening David sat long on his rock holding his flute and watching the thin golden crescent of the new moon floating through a pale amber sky, and one star near its tip slowly sliding down with it toward the deepening horizon.

The glowing sky bending to the purple hilltops — the crescent moon and the lone shining star — the evening breeze singing in the pines above him — the delicate arbutus blossoms hiding near his feet — the call of a bird to its mate, and the faint answering call from some distant shade — the call in his own heart that as yet returned to him unanswered, but with its quiet surety of ultimate response — the joy of these moments perfect in beauty and a more abundant assurance of gladness near at hand — filled him and lifted his soul to follow the star.

Guided by the unseen hand that held the earth, the crescent moon and the star to their orbits, would he find the great happiness that should be not his alone, but also for the eyes uplifted to the mountain top and the heart waiting in the shadows for the one to be sent? Ah, surely, surely, for this had he come. He stooped to the arbutus blossoms to inhale their fragrance. He rose and, lifting his flute to his lips, played to solace his own waiting, inventing new caprices and tossing forth the notes daringly — delicately — rapturously — now penetrating and strong, now faintly following and scarcely heard, uttering a wordless gladness.

Under the great holly tree in the shadows Cassandra sat, watching, as he watched, the crescent moon and the lone star sailing in the pale amber light, with the deepening purple mountain hiding the dim distance below them. Often in the early evening when her mother and Hoyle were sleeping, she would climb up here to pray for Frale that he might truly repent, and for herself that she might

be strong in her purpose to give up all her cherished hopes and plans, if thereby she might save him from his own wild, reckless self.

It was here his boy's passion had been revealed to her, and here she had seen him changed from boy to man, filled with a man's hunger for her, which had led him to crime, and held him unrepentant and glad could he thus hold her his own. She must give up the life she had hoped to lead and take upon her the life of the wife of Cain, to help him expiate his deed. For this must she bow her head to the yoke her mother had borne before her. In the sadness of her heart she said again and again: "Christ will understand. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief! He will understand."

Again came to her, as they had often come of late, dropping down through the still air, down through the leafless boughs like joyful hopes yet to be realized, the flute notes. What were they, those sweet sounds? She held her breath and lifted her face toward the sky. Once, long ago in France, the peasant girl had heard the "Voices." Were they heavenly sweet, like these sounds? Did they drop from the sky and fill the air like these? Oh, why should they seem like hopes to her who had put away from her all hope? Were they bringing hope to her who must rise to toil and lie down in weariness for labor never done; who must hold always with sorrowing heart and clinging hands to the soul of a murderer — hold and cling, if haply she might save — and weep for that which, for her, might never be? Were they bringing hope that she might yet live gladly as the birds live; that she might go beyond that and live like those who have no sin imposed on them, to walk with the gods, she knew not how, but to rise to things beyond her ken?

Down came the notes, sweet, shrill, white notes, — hurrying, drifting, lingering, calling her to follow; down on her heart with healing and comfort they fell, lightly as dew on flowers, sparkling with life, joy-giving and pure.

Slowly she began climbing, listening, waiting, one step upward after another, following the sound. As if in a trance she moved. Below her the noise of falling water made a murmuring accompaniment to the music dropping from above — an earth-made accompaniment to heaven-

sent melody, meeting and forming a perfect harmony in her heart as she climbed. Gradually the horror and the sorrow fell away from her even, as the soul shall one day shed its garment of earth, until at last she stood alone and silent near David, etherealized in the faint light to a spirit-like semblance of a woman.

With a glad pounding of his heart he sprang towards her. Scarcely conscious of the act he held out both his arms, but she did not move. She stood silently regarding him, her hands dropped at her side, then with drooping head she turned and began wearily to descend the way she had come. He followed her and took her hand. She let it lie passively in his and walked on. He wished he might feel her fingers close warmly about his own, but no, they were cold. She seemed wholly withdrawn from him, and her face bore the look of one who was walking in her sleep, yet he knew her to be awake.

"Miss Cassandra, speak to me," he begged, in quiet tones. "Don't walk away until you tell me why you came."

She seemed then to become aware that he was holding her by the hand and withdrew it, and in the faint light he thought she smiled. "It was just foolishness. You will laugh at me. I heard the music, and I thought it might be — you made it I reckon, but down there it sounded like it might be the 'Voices.' You remember how they came to Joan of Arc, like we were reading last week?" She began to walk on more hurriedly.

"I will go down with you," he said, "you thought it might be the voices? What did they say to you?"

"Oh, don't go with me. I never heed the dark."

"Won't you let me go with you? What did the flute say to you? Can't you tell me?"

She laughed a little then. "It was only foolishness. I reckon the 'Voices' never come these days. I have heard it before, but didn't know where it came from. It just seemed to drop down from heaven like, and this time it seemed some different, as if it might be the 'Voices' calling. It was pretty, suh, far away and soft — like part — of everything. My father's playing sounded sad most times, like sweet crying, but this was more like sweet laughing. I never heard anything so glad like this was, so I tried to

find it. Now I know it is you who make it I won't disturb you again, suh. Good evening." She hastened away and was soon lost in the gloom.

David stood until he heard her footsteps no more, then turned and entered his cabin, his mind and heart full of her. Surely he had called her, and the sound of his call was to her like "sweet laughing." Her face and her quaint expressions went with him into his dreams.

When he hurried down to the widow's place next morning, his mind filled with plans which he meant to carry out and was sure, with the boyish certainty of his nature he could compass, he heard the voice of little Hoyle shrilly calling to old Pete: "Whoa, mule. Haw there. Haw there, mule. What ye goin' that side fer; come 'round here."

Below the widow's house, the stream, after its riotous descent from the fall, meandered quietly through the rich bit of meadow and field, her inheritance for over a hundred years, establishing her claim to distinction among her neighbors. Here Martha Caswell had lived with her mother and her two brothers until she married and went with her young husband over "t'other side Pisgah"; then her mother sent for them to return, begging her son-in-law to come and care for the place. Her two sons, reckless and wild, were allowing the land to run to waste, and the buildings to fall in pieces through neglect.

The daughter Martha, true to her name, was thrifty and careful, and under her influence, her gentle dreamer of a husband, who cared more for his fiddle, his books, and his sermons, gradually redeemed the soil from weeds and the buildings from dilapidation, until at last, with the proceeds of her weaving and his own hard labor, they saved enough to buy out the brothers' interests.

By that time the younger son had fallen a victim to his wild life, and the other moved down into the low country among his wife's people. Thus were the Merlins left alone on their primitive estate. Here they lived contentedly with Cassandra, their only child, and her father's constant companion, until the tragedy which she had so simply related to David.

Her father's learning had been peculiar. Only a little classic lore, treasured where schools were none and books

were few, handed down from grandfather to grandson. His Greek he had learned from the two small books the widow had so carefully preserved, their marginal notes his only lexicon. They and his Bible and a copy of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* were all that were left of his treasures. A teething puppy had torn his *Dialogues of Plato* to shreds, and when his successor had come into the home, he had used the *Marcus Aurelius* for gun wadding, ere his wife's precaution of placing the padlock from the door on her mother's old linen chest.

To-day, as David passed the house, the old mother sat on her little porch churning butter in a small dasher churn. She was glad, as he could see, because she could do something once more.

"Now are you happy?" he called laughingly, as he paused beside her.

"Well, I be. Hit's been a right smart o' while since I been able to do a lick o' work. We sure do have a heap to thank you fer. Be Decatur Irwin as glad to lose his foot as I be to git my laig back?" she queried whimsically; "I reckon not."

"I reckon not, too, but with him it was a case of losing his life or his foot, while with you it was only a question of walking about, or being bedridden for the next twenty years."

"They be ignorant, them Irwins, an' she's more'n that, fer she's a fool. She come round yest'day wantin' to borry a hoe to fix up her gyarden patch, an' she 'lowed ef you'n Cass had only lef' him be, he'd 'a' come through all right, fer hit war a-gettin' better the day you-uns took hit off. I told her yas, he'd 'a' come cl'ar through to the nex' world, like Farwell done. When the misery left him, he up an' died, an' Lord knows whar he went."

"I'll get him an artificial foot as soon as he is able to wear one. He'll get on very well with a peg under his knee until then. What's Hoyle doing with the mule?"

"He's rid'n' him fer Cass. She's tryin' to get the ground ready fer a crap. Hit's all we can do. Our women nevah war used to do such work neither, but she would try."

"What's that? Is she ploughing?" he asked sharply, and strode away.

"I reckon she don't want ye there, Doctah," the widow called after him, but he walked on.

The land lay in a warm hollow completely surrounded by hills. It had been many years cleared, and the mellow soil was free from stumps and roots. When Thryng arrived, three furrows had been run rather crookedly the length of the patch, and Cassandra stood surveying them ruefully, flushed and troubled, holding to the handles of the small plough and struggling to set it straight for the next furrow.

The noise of the fall behind them covered his approach, and ere she was aware he was at her side. Placing his two hands over hers which clung stubbornly to the handles of the plough, he possessed himself of them. Laughingly he turned her about after the short tussle, and looked down into her warm, flushed face. Still holding her hands, he pulled her away from the plough to the grassy edge of the field, leaving Hoyle waiting astride the mule.

"Whoa, mule. Stand still thar," he shrilled, as the beast sought to cross the bit of ploughed ground to reach the grass beyond.

"Let him eat a minute, Hoyle," said David. "Let him eat until I come. Now, Miss Cassandra, what does this mean? Do you think you can plough all that land? Is that it?"

"I must."

"You must not."

"There is no one else now. I must." He could feel her hands quiver in his, as he forcibly held them, and knew from her panting breath how her heart was beating. She held her head high, nevertheless, and looked bravely back into his eyes.

"You must let me —" he paused. Intuitively he knew he must not say as yet what he would. "Let me direct you a little. You have been most kind to me — and — it is my place; I am a doctor, you know."

"If I were sick or hurt, I would give heed to you, I would do anything you say; but I'm not, and this is laid on me to do. Leave go my hands, Doctor Thryng."

"If you'll sit down here a moment and talk this thing out with me, I will. Now tell me first of all, why is this laid on you?"

"Frale is gone and it must be done, or we will have no crop, and then we must sell the animals, and then go down and live like poor white trash." Her low, passive monotone sounded like a moan of sorrow.

"You must hire some one to do this heavy work."

"Every one is working his own patch now, and — no, I have no money to hire with. I reckon I've thought it all over every way, Doctor." She looked sadly down at her hands and then up at the mountain top. "I know you think this is no work for a girl to do, and you are right. Our women never have done such. Only in the war times my Grandmother Caswell did it, and I can now. A girl can do what she must. I have no way to turn but to live as my people have lived before me. I thought once I might do different, go to school and keep separate — but —" She spread out her hands with a hopeless gesture, and rose to resume her work.

"Give me a moment longer. I'm not through yet. That's right, now listen. I see the truth of what you say, and I came down this morning to make a proposition to your mother — not for your sake only — don't be afraid, for my own as well; but I didn't make it because I hadn't time. She told me what you were doing, and I hurried off to stop you. Don't speak yet, let me finish. I feel I have the right, because I know — I know I was sent here just now for a purpose — guided to come here." He paused to allow his words to have their full weight. Whether she would perceive his meaning remained to be seen.

"I understand." She spoke quietly. "Doctor Hoyle sent you to be helped like he was — and you have been right kind to more than us. You've helped that many it seems like you were sent here for we-all as well as for your own sake, but that can't help me now, Doctor; it —"

"Ah, yes it can. I'm far from well yet. I shall be, but I must stay on for a long time, and I want some interest here. I want to see things of my own growing. The ground up around my little cabin is stony and very poor, and I want to rent this little farm of yours. Listen — I'll pay enough so you need not sell your cattle, and you — you can go on with your weaving. You can work in the house again as you have always done. Sometime,

when your mother is stronger, you can take up your life again and go to school — as you meant to live — can't you?"

"That can never be now. If you take the farm or not, I must bide on here in the old way. I must take up the life my mother lived and my grandmother, and hers before her. It is mine, forever, to live it that way — or die."

"Why do you talk so?"

"God knows, but I can't tell you. Thank you, suh. I will be right glad to rent you the farm. I'd a heap rather you had it than any one else I ever knew, for we care more for it than you would guess, but for the rest — no. I must bide and work till I die; only maybe I can save little Hoyle and give him a chance to learn something, for he never could work — being like he is."

Thryng's eyes danced with joy as he regarded her. "Hoyle is not going to be always as he is, and he shall have the chance to learn something also. Look up, Miss Cassandra, look squarely into my eyes and laugh. Be happy, Miss Cassandra, and laugh. I say it."

She laughed softly then. She could not help it.

"Wasn't that what the 'Voices' were saying last night when you followed?"

"Yes, yes. They seemed like they were calling, 'Hope, hope,' but they were not the real 'Voices.' You made it."

"Yes, I made it; and I was truly calling that to you. And you replied; you came to me."

"Ah, but that is different from the 'Voices' she heard."

"But if they called the truth to you — what then?"

"Doctah, there is no longer any hope for me. God called me and let me cut off all hope, once. I did it, and now, only death can change it."

"If I believe you, you must believe me. We won't talk of it any more. I'm hungry. Your mother was churning up there; let's go and get some buttermilk, and settle the business of the rent. You've run three good furrows and I'll run three more beside them — my first, remember, in all my life. Then we'll plant that strip to sunflowers. Come, Hoyle, tie the mule and follow us."

So David carried his way. They walked merrily back to the house, chattering of his plans and what he would raise. He knew nothing whatever of the sort of crops to

be raised, and she was naïvely gay at his expense, a mood he was overjoyed to awaken in her. He vowed that merely to walk over ploughed ground made a man stronger.

On the porch he sat and drank his buttermilk and, placing his paper on the step, drew up a contract for rent. Then Cassandra went to her weaving, and he and Hoyle returned to the field, where with much labor he succeeded in turning three furrows beside Cassandra's, rather crooked and uncertain ones, it is true, but quite as good as hers, as Hoyle reluctantly admitted, which served to give David a higher respect for farmers in general and ploughmen especially.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH DAVID DISCOVERS CASSANDRA'S TROUBLE

After turning his furrows, David told Hoyle to ride the mule to the stable, then he sat himself on the fence, and meditated. He bethought him that in the paper he had drawn up he had made no provision for the use of the mule. He wiped his forehead and rubbed the perspiration from his hair, and coughed a little after his exertion, glad at heart to find himself so well off.

He would come and plough a little every day. Then he began to calculate the number of days it would take him to finish the patch, measuring the distance covered by the six furrows with his eye, and comparing it with the whole. He laughed to find that, at the rate of six furrows a day, the task would take him well on into the summer. Plainly he must find a ploughman.

Then the laying out of the ground! Why should he not have a vineyard up on the farther hill slope? He never could have any fruit from it, but what of that! Even if he went away and never returned, he would know it to be adding its beauty to this wonderful dream. Who could know what the future held for him — what this little spot might mean to him in the days to come? That he would go out, fully recovered and strong to play his part in life, he never doubted. Might not this idyl be a part of it? He thought of the girl sitting at her loom, swaying as she threw her shuttle with the rhythm of a poem, and weaving — weaving his life and his heart into her web, unknown to herself — weaving a thread of joy through it all which as yet she could not see. He knocked the ashes from his pipe and stood a moment gazing about him.

Yes, he really must have a vineyard, and a bit of pasture somewhere, and a field of clover. What grew best there he little knew, so he decided to go up and consult the widow.

There were other things also to claim his thoughts.

Over toward "Wild Cat Hole" there was a woman who needed his care; and he must not become so absorbed in his pastoral romance as to forget Hoyle. He was looking actually haggard these last few days, and his mother said he would not eat. It might be that he needed more than the casual care he was giving him. Possibly he could take him to Doctor Hoyle's hospital for radical treatment later in the season, when his crops were well started. He smiled as he thought of his crops, then laughed outright, and strolled back to the house, weary and hungry, and happy as a boy.

"Well, now, I like the look of ye," called the old mother from the porch, where she still sat. "'Pears like it's done ye good a-ready to turn planter. The' hain't nothin' better'n the smell o' new sile fer them 'at's consumpted."

"Mother," cried Cassandra from within, "don't call the doctor that! Come up and have dinner with us, Doctor." She set a chair for him as she spoke, but he would not. As he stood below them, looking up and exchanging merry banter with her mother, he laughed his contagious laugh.

"I bet he's tired," shrilled Hoyle, from his perch on the porch roof. "He be'n settin' on the fence smokin' an' rubbin' his hade with his handkercher like he'd had enough with his ploughin'. You can nigh about beat him, Cass. Hisn didn't look no better'n what yourn looked."

"Here, you young rascal you, come down from there," cried David. Catching him by the foot, which hung far enough over to be within reach of his long arm, he pulled him headlong from his high position and caught him in mid-air. "Now, how shall I punish you?"

"Ye bettah whollop him. He hain't nevah been switched good in his hull life. Maybe that's what ails him."

The child grinned. "I hain't afeared. Get me down on the ground oncet, an' I c'n run faster'n he can."

"Suppose I duck him in the water trough yonder?"

"I reckon he needs it. He generally do," smiled Cassandra from the doorway. "Come, son, go wash up." David allowed the child to slip to the ground. "Seems like Hoyle is right enough about you, though. Don't go away up the hill; bide here and have dinner first."

David dropped on the step for a moment's rest. "I see I must make a way up to my cabin that will not pass your door. How about that? Was dinner included in the rent, and the mule and the mule's dinner? And what is Hoyle going to pay me for allowing him to ride Pete up and down while I plough?"

"Yas, an' what are ye goin' to give him fer 'lowin' ye to set his hade round straight, an' what are ye goin' to give me fer 'lowin' ye to set me on my laigs again? Ef ye go a-countin' that-a-way, I'm 'feared ye're layin' up a right smart o' debt to we-uns. I reckon you'll use that mule all ye want to, an' ye'll lick him good, too, when he needs hit, an' take keer o' yourself, fer he's a mean critter; an' ye'll keep that path right whar hit is, fer hit goes with the farm long's you bide up yandah."

"You good people have the best of me; we'll call it all even. Ever since I leaped off that train in the snow, I have been dependent on you for my comfort. Well, I must hurry on; since I've turned farmer I'm a busy man. Can you suggest any one I might get to do that ploughing? Miss Cassandra here may be able to do it without help, but I confess I'm not equal to it."

"I be'n tellin' Cass that thar Elwine Timms, he ought to be able to do the hull o' that work. Widow Timmuses' son. They live ovah nigh the Gerret place thar at Lone Pine Creek. He used to help Frale with the still. An' then thar's Hoke Belew — he ought to do sumthin' fer all you done fer his wife — sittin' up the hull night long, an' gettin' up at midnight to run to them. Oh, I hearn a heap sittin' here. Things comes to me that-a-way. Thar hain't much goin' on within twenty mile o' here 'at I don't know. They is plenty hereabouts owes you a heap."

"I think I've been treated very well. They keep me supplied with all I need. What more can a man ask? The other day, a man brought me a sack of corn meal, fresh and sweet from the mill — a man with six children and a sick mother to feed, but what could I do? He would leave it, and I — well, I —"

"When they bring ye things, you take 'em. Ye'll help 'em a heap more that-a-way 'n ye will curin' 'em. The' hain't nothin' so good fer a man as payin' his debts. Hit

keeps his hade up whar a man 'at's good fer anything ought to keep hit. I hearn a heáp o' talk here in these mountains 'bouts bein' stuck up, but I tell 'em if a body feels he hain't good fer nothin', he pretty generally hain't. He'd a heap better feel stuck up to my thinkin'."

"They've done pretty well, all who could. They've brought me everything from corn whiskey to fodder for my horse. A woman brought me a bag of dried blueberries the other day. I don't know what to do with them. I have to take them, for I can't be graceless enough to send them away with their gifts."

"You bring 'em here, an' Cass'll make ye a blueberry cake to eat hot with butter melt'n' on hit 'at'll make ye think the world's a good place to live in."

"I'll do it," he said, laughing, and took his solitary path up the steep. Halfway to his cabin, he heard quick, scrambling steps behind him, and, turning, saw little Hoyle bringing Cassandra's small melon-shaped basket, covered with a white cloth.

"I said I could run faster'n you could. Cass, she sont some th' chick'n fry." He thrust the basket at Thryng and turned to run home.

"Here, here!" David called after the twisted, hunched little figure. "You tell your sister 'thank you very much,' for me. Will you?"

"Yas, suh," and the queer little gnome disappeared among the laurel below.

In the morning, David found the place of the Widow Timms, and her son agreed to come down the next day and accept wages for work. A weary, spiritless young man he was, and the home as poverty-stricken as was that of Decatur Irwin, and with almost as many children. It was with a feeling of depression that David rode on after his call, leaving the grandmother seated in the doorway, snuff stick between her yellow teeth, the grandchildren clustering about her knees, or squatting in the dirt, like young savages. Their father lounged in the wretched cabin, hardly to be seen in the windowless, smoke-blackened space nearly filled with beds heaped with ragged bedclothes, and broken splint-bottomed chairs hung about with torn and soiled garments.

The dirt and disorder irritated David, and he felt

angered at the clay-faced son for not being out preparing his little patch of ground. Fortunately, he had been able to conceal his annoyance enough to secure the man's promise to begin work next day, or he would have gained nothing but the family's resentment for his pains. Already David had learned that a sort of resentful pride was the last shred of respectability to which the poorest and most thriftless of the mountain people clung — pride of he knew not what, and resentfulness toward any who, by thrift and labor, were better off than themselves.

He reasoned that as the young man had been Frale's helper at the still, no doubt corn whiskey was at the bottom of their misery. This brought his mind to the thought of Frale himself. The young man had not been mentioned between him and Cassandra since the day she sought his help. He thought he could not be far from the still, as he forded Lone Pine Creek, on his way to the home of Hoke Belew, whose wife he was going to see.

David was interested in this young family; they seemed to him to be quite of the better sort, and as he put space between himself and the Widow Timms' deplorable state, his irritation gradually passed, and he was able to take note of the changes a week had wrought in the growing things about him.

More than once he diverged to investigate blossoming shrubs which were new to him, attracted now by a sweet odor where no flowers appeared, until closer inspection revealed them, and now by a blaze of color against the dark background of laurel leaves and gray rocks. Ah, the flaming azalea had made its appearance at last, huge clusters of brilliant bloom on leafless shrubs. How dazzlingly gay!

In the midst of his observance of things about him, and underneath his surface thoughts, he carried with him a continual feeling of satisfaction in the remembrance of the little farm below the Fall Place, and in an amused way planned about it, and built idly his "Castles in Spain." A bit of stone wall whose lower end was overgrown with vines pleased him especially, and a few enormous trees, which had been left standing when the spot had been originally cleared, and the vine-entangled, drooping trees along the banks of the small river that coursed

crookedly through it, — what possibilities it all presented to his imagination! If only he could find the right man to carry out his ideas for him, he would lease the place for fifty years for the privilege of doing as he would with it.

After a time he came out upon the cleared farm of Hoke Belew, who was industriously ploughing his field for cotton, and called out to him, "How's the wife?"

"She hain't not to say right smart, an' the baby don't act like he's well, neither, suh. Ride on to th' house an' light. She's thar, an' I'll be up d'rectly."

Thryng rode on and dismounted, tying his horse to a sapling near the door. The place was an old one. A rose vine, very ancient, covered the small porch and the black, old, moss-grown roof. The small green foliage had come out all over it in the week since he was last there. The glazed windows were open, and white homespun curtains were swaying in the light breeze. A small fire blazed on the hearth, and before it, in a huge-splint-bottomed rocking-chair, the pale young mother reclined languidly, wrapped in a patchwork quilt. The hearth was swept and all was neat, but very bare.

Close to the black fireplace on a low chair, with the month-old baby on her knees, sat Cassandra. She was warming something at the fire, which she reached over to stir now and then, while the red light played brightly over her sweet, grave face. Very intent she was, and lovely to see. She wore a creamy white homespun gown, coarse in texture, such as she had begun to wear about the house since the warm days had come. Thryng had seen her in such a dress but once before, and he liked it. With one arm guarding the little bundle in her lap, dividing her attention between it and the porridge she was making, she sat, a living embodiment of David's vision, silhouetted against and haloed by the red fire, softened by the blue, obscuring smoke-wreaths that slowly circled in great rings and then swept up the wide, overarching chimney.

He heard her low voice speaking, and his heart leaped toward her as he stood an instant, unheeded by them, ere he rapped lightly. They both turned with a slight start. Cassandra rose, holding the sleeping babe in the hollow of her arm, and set a chair for him before the fire. Then she

laid the child carefully in the mother's arms, and removed the porridge from the fire.

"Shall I call Hoke?" she asked, moving toward the door.

David did not want her to leave them, loving the sight of her. "Don't go. I saw him as I came along," he said.

But she went on, and sat herself on a seat under a huge locust tree. Tardiest of all the trees, it had not yet leaved out. Later it would be covered with a wealth of sweet white blossoms swarming with honey-bees, and the air all about it would be filled with its lavish fragrance and the noise of humming wings.

Presently Hoke came plodding up from the field, and smiled as he passed her. "Doc inside?" he asked.

She nodded. When David came out, he found her still seated there, her head resting wearily against the rough tree. She rose and came toward him.

"I thought I wouldn't leave until I knew if there was anything more I could do," she said simply.

"No, you've done all you can. She'll be all right. Where's your horse?"

"I walked."

"Why did you do that? You ought not, you know."

"Hoyle rode the colt down to see could Aunt Sally come here for a day or two, until Miz Belew can do for herself better." She turned back to the house.

"Come home now with me. Ride my horse, and I'll walk. I'd like to walk," urged David.

"Oh, no. Thank you, Doctor, I must speak to Azalie first. Don't wait."

She went in, and David mounted and rode slowly on, but not far. Where the trail led through a small stream which he knew she must cross, he dismounted and allowed the horse to drink, while he stood looking back along the way for her to come to him. Soon he saw her white dress among the glossy rhododendron leaves as she moved swiftly along, and he walked back to meet her.

"I have waited for you. You are not used to this kind of a saddle, I know, but what's the difference? You can ride cross-saddle as the young ladies do in the North, can't you?"

"I reckon I could." She laughed a little. "Do they

ride that way where you come from? It must look right funny. I don't guess I'd like it."

"But just try — to please me? Why not?"

"If you don't mind, I'd rather walk, please, suh. Don't wait."

"Then I will walk with you. I may do that, may I not?" He caught the bridle-rein on the saddle, leaving the horse to browse along behind as he would, and walked at her side. She made no further protest, but was silent.

"You don't object to this, do you?" he insisted.

"It's pleasanter than being alone, but it's right far to walk, seems like, for you."

"Then why not for you?" She smiled her mysterious, quiet smile. "You must know that I am stronger than you?" he persisted.

"I ought to think so, since that day we rode over to Cate Irwin's, but I was right afraid for you that time, lest you get cold; and then it was me —" she paused, and looked squarely in his eyes and laughed. "You wouldn't say 'it was me,' would you?"

He joined merrily in her laughter. "I never corrected you on that."

"You never did, but you didn't need to. I often know, after I've said something — not — right — as you would say it."

"Do you, indeed?" he walked nearer, boyishly happy because she was close beside him. He wanted to touch her, to take her hand and walk as children do, but could not because of the subtile barrier he felt between them. He determined to break it down. "Finish what you were saying? And then it was me — what?"

"And then it was I who gave out, not you."

"But you were a heroine — a heroine from the ground up, and I love you." He spoke with such boyish impulsiveness that she took the remark as one of his extravagances, and merely smiled indulgently, as if amused at it. She did not even flush, but accepted it as she would an outburst from Hoyle.

David was amazed. It only served to show him how completely outside that charmed circle within which she lived he still was. He was maddened by it. He came

nearer and bent to look in her face, until she lifted her eyes to look fairly in his.

"That's right. Look at me and understand me. I waited there only that I might tell you. Why do you put a wall between us? I tell you I love you. I love you, Cassandra; do you understand?"

She stood quite still and gazed at him in amazement, almost as if in terror. Her face grew white, and she pressed her two hands on her heart, then slowly slid them up to her round white throat as if it hurt her — a movement he had seen in her twice before, when suffering emotion.

"Why, Cassandra, does it hurt you for me to tell you that I love you? Beautiful girl, does it?"

"Yes, suh," she said huskily.

He would have taken her in his arms, but refrained for very love of her. She should be sacred even from his touch, if she so wished, and the barrier, whatever it might be, should halo her. He had spoken so tenderly he had no need to tell her. The love was in his eyes and his voice, but he went on.

"Then I must be cruel and hurt you. I love you all the days and the nights — all the moments of the days — I love you."

In very terror, she flung out her hands and placed them on his breast, holding him thus at arm's-length, and with head thrown back, still looked into his eyes piteously, imploringly. With trembling lips, she seemed to be speaking, but no voice came. He covered her hands with his, and held them where she had placed them.

"You have put a wall between us. Why have you done it?"

"I didn't — didn't know; I thought you were — as far — as far away from us as the star — the star of gold is — from our world in the night — so far — I didn't guess — you could come so — near." She bowed her head and wept.

"You are the star yourself, you beautiful — you are —"

But she stopped him, crying out. She could not draw her hands away, for he still held them clasped to his heart.

"No, no! The wall is there. It must be between us

for always, I am promised." The grief wailed and wept in her tones, and her eyes were wide and pleading. "I must lead my life, and you — you must stay outside the wall. If you love me — Doctor, — you must never know it, and I must never know it." Her beating heart stopped her speech and they both stood thus a moment, each seeing only the other's soul.

"Promised?" The word sank into his heart like lead. "Promised?" Slowly he released her hands, and she covered her face with them and sank at his feet. He bent down to her and asked almost in a whisper: "Promised? Did you say that word?"

She drooped lower and was silent.

All the chivalry of his nature rose within him. Should he come into her life only to torment and trouble her? Ought he to leave the place? Could he bear to live so near her? What had she done — this flower? Was she to be devoured by swine? The questions clamored at the door of his heart. But one thing could he see clearly. He must wait without the wall, seeking only to serve and protect her.

With the unerring instinct which led her always straight to the mark, she had seen the only right course. He repeated her words over and over to himself. "If you love me, you must never know it, and I must never know it." Her heart should be sacred from his personal intrusion, and their old relations must be reëstablished, at whatever cost to himself.

With flash-light clearness he saw his difficulty, and that only by the elimination of self could he serve her, and also that her manner of receiving his revelation had but intensified his feeling for her. The few short moments seemed hours of struggle with himself ere he raised her to her feet and spoke quietly, in his old way.

He lifted her hand to his lips. "It is past, Miss Cassandra. We will drop these few moments out of your life into a deep well, and it shall be as if they had never been." He thought as he spoke that the well was his own heart, but that he would not say, for henceforth his love and service must be selfless. "We may be good friends still? Just as we were?"

"Yes, suh," she spoke meekly.

"And we can go right on helping each other, as we have done all these weeks? I do not need to leave you?"

"Oh, no, no!" She spoke with a gasp of dismay at the thought. "It — won't hurt so much if I can see you going right on — getting strong — like you have been, and being happy — and —" She paused in her slowly trailing speech and looked about her. They were down in a little glen, and there were no mountain tops in sight for her to look up to as was her custom.

"And what, Cassandra? Finish what you were saying." Still for a while she was silent, and they walked on together. "And now won't you say what you were going to say?" He could not talk himself, and he longed to hear her voice.

"I was thinking of the music you made. It was so glad. I can't talk and say always what I think, like you do, but seems like it won't hurt me so here," she put her hand to her throat, "where it always hurts me when I am sorry at anything, if I can hear you glad in the music — like you were that — night I thought you were the 'Voices.'"

"Cassandra, it shall be glad for you, always."

She looked into his eyes an instant with the clear light of understanding in her own. "But for you? It is for you I want it to be glad."

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH DAVID VISITS THE BISHOP, AND FRALE SEES HIS ENEMY

THE bishop was seated in a deep canvas chair on his wide veranda, looking out over his garden toward a distant line of blue hills. His little wife sat close to his side on a low rocker, very busy with the making of buttonholes in a small girl's frock of white dimity and lace. Betty Towers loved lace and pretty things.

The small girl was playing about the garden paths with her puppy and chattering with Frale in her high, happy, childish voice, while he bent weeding among the beds of okra and egg-plant. His face wore a more than usually discontented look, even when answering the child with teasing banter. Now and then he lifted his eyes from his work and watched furtively the movements of David Thryng, who was pacing restlessly up and down the long veranda in earnest conversation with the bishop and his wife.

The two in the garden could not understand what was being said at the house, but each party could hear the voices of the other, and by calling out a little could easily converse across the dividing hedge and the intervening space.

"Talk about the influence of the beautiful in nature upon the human soul, — it is all very pretty, but I believe the soul must be more or less enlightened to feel it. I've learned a few things among your people up there in the mountains. Strange beings they are."

"It only goes to show that heredity alone won't do everything," said the bishop, placing the tips of his fingers together and frowning meditatively.

"Heredity? It means a lot to us over there in England."

"Yes, yes. But your old families need a little new blood in them now and then, even if they have to come over here for it."

"For that and — your money — yes." Thryng laughed. "But these mountain people of yours, who are they anyway?"

"Most of them are of as pure a strain of British as any in the world — as any you will find at home. They have their heredity — and only that — from all your classes over there, but it is from those of a hundred or more years ago. They are the unmixed descendants of those you sent over here for gain, drove over by tyranny, or exported for crime."

"How unmixed in your most horribly mixed and mongrel population?"

"Circumstances and environment have kept them to the pure stock, and neglect has left them untrammelled by civilization and unaided by education. Time and generations of ignorance have deteriorated them, and nature alone — as you were but now admitting — has hardly served to arrest the process by the survival of the fittest."

"Nature — yes —how do you account for it? I have been in the grandest, most wonderful places, I venture to say, that are to be found on earth, and among all the glory that nature can throw around a man, he is still, if left to himself, more bestial than the beasts. He destroys and defaces and defiles nature; he kills — for the mere sake of killing — more than he needs; he enslaves himself to his appetites and passions, follows them wildly, yields to them recklessly; and destroys himself and all the beauty around him that he can reach, wantonly. Why, Bishop Towers, sometimes I've gone out and looked up at the stars above me and wondered which was real, they and the marvellous beauty all around me, or the three hundred reeking humanity sleeping in the camp beneath them. Sometimes it seemed as if only hell were real, and the camp was a bit of it let loose to mock at heaven."

"We mustn't forget that what is transitory is not a part of God's eternity of spirit and truth."

"Oh, yes, yes! But we do forget. And some transitory things are mighty hard to endure, especially if they must endure for a lifetime."

David was thinking of Cassandra and what in all probability would be her doom. He had not mentioned her name, but he had come down with the intention of learning

all he could about her, and if possible to whom she was "promised." He feared it might be the low-browed, handsome youth bending over the garden beds beyond the hedge, and his heart rebelled and cried out fiercely within him, "What a waste, what a waste!"

Betty Towers, intent on her sewing, felt the thrill that intensified David's tone, and she, too, thought of Cassandra. She dropped her work in her lap and looked earnestly in her husband's face.

"James, I feel just as Doctor Thryng does — when I think of some things. When I see a tragedy coming to a human soul, I feel that a lifetime of transitory things like that is hard to endure. Fancy, James! Think of Cassandra. You know her, Doctor Thryng, of course. They live just below your place. She is the Widow Farwell's daughter, but her name is Merlin."

David arrested his impatient stride and, drawing a chair near her, dropped into it. "What about her?" he said. "What is the tragedy?"

"I think, Betty, the hills must keep their own secrets," said the bishop.

His little wife compressed her lips, glanced over the hedge at the young man who happened at the moment to have straightened from his bent position among the plants and was gazing at their guest, then resumed her sewing.

"Is it something I must not be told?" asked David, quietly. "But I may have my suspicions. Naturally we can't help that."

"I think it is better to know the truth. I don't like suspicions. They are sure to lead to harm. James, let me put it to the doctor as I see it, and see what he thinks of it."

"As you please, dear."

"It's like this. Have you seen anything of that girl or observed her much?"

"I certainly have."

"Then, of course, you can see that she is one of the best of the mountain people, can't you? Well! She has promised to marry — promised to marry — think of it! one of the wildest, most reckless of those mountain boys, one that she knows very well has been in illicit distilling.

He is a lawbreaker in that way; and, more than that, he drinks, and in a drunken row he shot dead his friend."

"Ah!" David rose, turned away, and again paced the piazza. Then he returned to his seat. "I see. The young man I tried to help off when I first arrived."

"Yes. There he is."

"I see. Handsome type."

"He's down here now, keeping quiet. How long it will last, no one knows. Justice is lax in the mountains. His father shot three or four men before he died himself of a gunshot wound which he received while resisting the officers of the law. If there's a man left in the family to follow this thing up, Frale will be hunted down and arrested or shot; otherwise, when things have cooled off a little up there, he will go back and open up the old business, and the tragedy will be repeated. James, you know how often after the best you could do and all their promises, they go back to it?"

"I admit it's always a question. They don't seem to be content in the low country. I think it is often a sort of natural gravitation back to the mountains where they were born and bred, more than it is depravity."

"I know, James, but that excuse won't help Cassandra."

"Why did she do it?" asked David. "She must have known to what such a marriage would bring her."

"Do it? That is the sort of girl she is. If she thought she ought, she would leap over that fall there."

"But why should she think she ought? Had she given her — promise —" David saw her as she appeared to him when she had said that word to him on the mountain, and it silenced him, but only for a moment. He would learn all he could of her motives now. He must — he would know. "I mean before he did this, before she went away to study — had she made him such a — promise?"

"No. You tell him about it, James. You have seen her and talked with her. They were quarrelling about her, as I understand, and she thinks because she was the cause of the deed she must help him make retribution. Isn't that it, James? She knows perfectly well what it means for her, for she has had her aspirations. I can see it all. Frale says he was not drunk nor his friend either. He says the other man claimed — but I won't go into that —

only Cassandra promised him before God, he says, that if he would repent, she would marry him. And when she was here she used to talk about the way those women live. How her own mother has worked and aged! Why, she is not yet sixty. You have seen how they live in their wretched little cabins, Doctor; that's what Frale would doom her to. He never in life will understand her. He'll grow old like his father, — a passionate, ignorant, untamed animal, and worse, for he would be drunken as well. He's been drunk twice since he came down here. James, you know they think it's perfectly right to get drunk Saturday afternoon."

"Yes, it seems a terrible waste; but if she has children, she will be able to do more for them than her mother has done for her, and they will have her inheritance; so her life can't be wholly wasted, even if she is not able to live up to her aspirations."

"James Towers! I — that — it's because you are a man that you can talk so! I'm ashamed, and you a bishop! I wish —" Betty's eyes were full of angry tears. "I only wish you were a woman. Slowly improve the race by bearing children — giving them her inheritance! How would she bear them? Year after year — ill fed, half clothed, slaving to raise enough to hold their souls in their bodies, bringing them into the world for a brute who knows only enough to make corn whiskey — to sell it — and drink it — and reproduce his kind — when — when she knows all the time what ought to be! Oh, James, James, think of it!"

"My dear, my dear, you forget, he has promised to repent and live a different life. If he does, things will be better than we now see them. If he does not change, then we may interfere — perhaps."

"I know, James. But — but — suppose he repents and she becomes his wife, and puts aside all her natural tastes, and the studies she loves, and goes on living with him there on the home place, and he does the best he can — even. Don't you see that her nature is fine and — and so different — even at the best, James, for her it will be death in life. And then there is the terrible chance, after all, that he might go back and be like his father before him, and then what?"

"Well, their lives and destinies are not in our hands; we can only watch out for them and help them."

"James, he has been drunk twice!"

"Yes, yes, Betty, my little tempest, and if he gets drunk twice more, and twice more, she will still forgive him until seventy times seven. We must make her see that unless he keeps his promise to her, she must give him up."

"Of course. I suppose that's all we can do. I — don't know what you'll think of me, Doctor Thryng; I'm a dreadful scold. If James were not an angel —"

"It's perfectly delicious. I would rather hear you scold than —"

"Than hear James preach," laughed the bishop. "I agree with you."

"I agree with her," said David, emphatically. "It ought to be stopped if —"

"If it ought to be, it will be. What do you think she said to me about it when I went to reason with her? 'If Christ can forgive and stand such as he, I can. It is laid on my soul to do this.' I had no more to say."

"That is one point of view, but we mustn't lose sight of the practical, either. To be his wife and bear his children — I call it a waste, a —"

"Yes, yes. So it is." And what more could the bishop say? After a little, he added, "But still we must not forget that he, too, is a human soul and has a value as great as hers."

"According to your viewpoint, but not to mine — not to mine. If a man is enslaved to his own appetites, he has no right to enslave another to them."

The following day David took himself back to his hermitage, setting aside all persuasions to remain.

"Don't make a recluse of yourself," begged the bishop's wife. "The amenities of life can't always be dispensed with, and we need you, James and I, you and your music."

David laughed. "I'm too fatally human to become a recluse, and as for the amenities, they are not all of one order, you know. I find plenty of scope for exercising them on others, and I often submit to having them exercised on me, — after their own ideas." He laughed again. "I wish you could look into my larder. You'd find me

provided with all the hills afford. They have loaded me with gifts."

"No wonder! I know what your life up there means to them, taking care of their mothers and babies, and sitting up with them nights, going to them when they are in trouble, rain or shine, and visiting them in their bare, wretched, crowded homes."

"It wouldn't be so bad often, if it weren't that when a family is in serious trouble or has a case needing quiet and care, the sympathies of all their relatives are roused, and they come crowding in. In one case, the father was ill with pneumonia. I did all I could for him, and next day — would you believe it? — I found his sister and her 'old man' and their three youngsters, his old mother and a brother and a widowed sister, all camped down on them, all in one room. The sister sat by the fire nursing her three-months-old baby, his mother was smoking at her side, and the sick man's six little children and their three cousins were raising Ned, in and out, with three or four hounds. Not one of the visitors was helping, or, as they say up there, 'doing a lick,' but the wife was cooking for the whole raft when her husband needed all her care. Marvellous ideas they have, some of them."

"You ought to write out some of your experiences."

"Oh, I can't. It would seem like a sort of betrayal of friendship. They have adopted me, so to speak, and are so naïve and kind, and have trusted me — I think they are my friends. I may be very odd — you know."

"I know how you feel," said Betty.

The bishop's little daughter had assumed the proprietorship of the doctor. She even preferred his companionship to that of her puppy. She clung to his hand as he walked away, pulling and swinging upon his arm to coax him back. He took her in his arms and carried her out upon the walk, the small dog barking and snapping at his heels, as David threatened to bear his tyrannical young mistress away to the station.

"Doggie wants you to leave me here," she cried, pounding him vigorously with her two little fists.

He brought her back and placed her on the broad, flat top of the high gate-post. "Very well, doggie may have you. I will leave you here."

"Doggie wants you to stay, too." She held him with her small arms about his neck.

"Well, doggie can't have me." He unclinched her chubby hands, crossed them in her lap, and held them fast while he kissed her tanned and rosy cheek. "Good-by, you young rogue," he said, and strode away.

"Come and lift me down," she wailed. But he knew well she could scramble down by herself when she chose, and walked on. She continued to call after him; then, spying Frale in the wood yard, she imperatively summoned him to her aid, and trotted at his side back to the wood-pile, where they sat comfortably upon a log and visited together.

They were the best of friends and chattered with each other as if both were children. In the slender shadow of a juniper tree that stood like a sentinel in the corner of the wood yard they sat, where a high board fence separated them from the back street.

The bishop's place was well planted, and this corner had been the quarters of the house servants in slave times. It was one of Frale's duties to pile here, for winter use, the firewood which he cut in short lengths for the kitchen fire, and long lengths for the open fireplaces.

He hated the hampered village life, and round of small duties — the weeding in the garden, cleaning of piazzas and windows, and the sweeping of the paths. The wood-cutting was not so bad, but the rest he held in contempt as women's work. He longed to throw his gun in the hollow of his arm and tramp off over his own mountains. At night he often wept, for homesickness, and wished he might spend a day tending still, or lying on a ridge watching the trail below for intruders on his privacy.

The joy of life had gone out for him. He thought continually of Cassandra and desired her; and his soul wearied for her, until he was tempted to go back to the mountains at all risks, merely for a sight of her. Painfully he had tried to learn to write, working at the copies Betty Towers had set for him, — and certainly she had done all her conscientious heart prompted to interest him and keep him away from the village loungers. He had even progressed far enough to send two horribly spelled missives to Cassandra, feeling great pride in them. And now he

had begun to weary of learning. To be able to write those badly scrawled notes was in his eyes surely enough to distinguish him from his companions at home; of what use was more?

"What's that you are tossing up in the air? Let me see it," demanded the child, as Frale tossed and caught again a small, bright object. He kept on tossing it and catching it away from the two little hands stretched out to receive it. "Give it to me. Give it to me, Frale. Let me see it."

He dropped it lightly in her palm. "Don't you lose hit. That thar's somethin' 'at's got a charm to hit."

"What's a 'charm to hit'? I don't see any charm."

Then Frale laughed aloud. He took it with his thumb and forefinger and held it between his eye and the sun. "Is that the way you see the 'charm to hit'? Let me try."

But he slipped it in his pocket, first placing it in a small bag which he drew up tightly with a string. "Hit hain't nothing you kin see. Hit's only a charm 'at makes hit plumb sure to kill anybody 'at hit hits. Hit's plumb sure to hit an' plumb sure to kill, too."

"Oh, Frale! What if it had hit me when you threw it up that way — and — killed me? Then you'd be sorry, wouldn't you, Frale?"

"Hit nevah wouldn't kill a girl — a nice little girl — like you be. Hit's charmed that-a-way, 'at hit won't kill nobody what I don't want hit to."

"Then what do you keep it in your pocket for? You don't want to kill anybody, do you, Frale?"

"Naw — I reckon not; not 'thout I have to."

"But you don't have to, do you, Frale?" piped the child.

He rose, and selecting an armful of stove wood carried it into the shed and began packing it away. Dorothy sat still on the log, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands, meditating. A tall man slouched by and peered over the high board fence at her. His eyes roved all about the place eagerly, keen and black. His matted hair hung long beneath his soft felt hat. The child looked up at him with fearless, questioning glance, then trotted in to her friend.

"Frale, did you see that man lookin' over the fence?

You think he was lookin' for you, Frale? Come see who 'tis. P'r'aps he's a friend of yours."

"Dorothy, Dorothy," called her mother from the piazza, and the child bounded away, her puppy yelping and leaping at her side. The tall man turned at the corner and looked back at the child.

The bishop's place occupied one corner of the block, and the fence with a hedge beneath it ran the whole length of two sides. Slowly sauntering along the second side, the gaunt, hungry-eyed man continued his way, searching every part of the yard and garden, even endeavoring, with backward, furtive glances, to see into the woodhouse, where in the darkness Frale crouched, once more pallid with abject fear, peering through the crack where on its hinges the door swung half open.

As the man disappeared down the straggling village street, Frale dropped down on the wheelbarrow and buried his haggard face in his hands. A long time he sat thus, until the dinner-hour was past, and black Carrie had to send Dorothy to call him. Then he rose, but in the place of the white and haunted look was one of stubborn recklessness. He strolled to the house with the nonchalant air of one who fears no foes, but rather glories in meeting them, and sat himself down at his place by the kitchen table, where he bantered and badgered Carrie, who waited on him reluctantly, with contemptuous tosses of her woolly head. From the day of his first appearance there had been war between them, and now Frale knew that if the stranger asked her, she would gladly and slyly inform against him.

The afternoon wore on. Again Frale sat on the wheelbarrow, thinking, thinking. He took the small bag from his pocket and felt of the bullet through the thin covering, then replaced it, and, drawing forth another bag, began counting his money over and over. There it was, all he had saved, five dollars in bills, and a few quarters and dimes.

He did not like to leave the shelter of the shed, and his eyes showed only the narrow glint of blue as, with half-closed lids, he still peered out and watched the street where his enemy had disappeared. Suddenly he rose and climbed with swift, catlike movements up the ladder stairs behind

him, which led to his sleeping loft. There he rapidly donned his best suit of dyed homespun, tied his few remaining articles of clothing in a large red kerchief, and before a bit of mirror arranged his tie and hair to look as like as possible to the village youth of Farington. The distinguishing silken lock that would fall over his brow had grown again, since he had shorn it away in Doctor Thryng's cabin. Now he thrust it well up under his soft felt hat, and, taking his bundle, descended. Again his eyes searched up and down the street and all about the house and yard before he ventured out in the daylight.

Dorothy and her dog came bounding down the kitchen steps. She carried two great fried cakes in her little hands, warm from the hot fat, and she laughed with glee as she danced toward him.

"Frale, Frale. I stole these, I did, for you. I told Carrie I wanted two for you, an' she said 'G'long, chile.'" She thrust them in his hands.

"What's the matter, Frale? What you all dressed up for? This isn't Sunday, Frale. Is they going to be a circus, Frale, is they?" She poured forth her questions rapidly, as she hopped from one foot to the other. "Will you take me, Frale, if it's a circus? I'll ask mamma. I want to see the el'phant."

"'Tain't no circus," he replied grimly.

"What's the matter, Frale? Don't you like your fried cakes? Then why don't you eat them? What you wrapping them up for? You ought to say thank you, when I bring you nice cakes 'at I went an' stole for you," she remonstrated severely.

His throat worked convulsively as he stood, now looking at the child, now watching the street. Suddenly he lifted her in his arms and buried his face in her gingham apron.

"I had a little sister oncet, only she's growed up now, an' she hain't my little sister any more." He kissed her brown cheek tenderly, even as David had done, and set her gently down on her two stubby feet. "You run in an' tell yer maw thank you, fer me, will ye? Mind, now. Listen at me whilst I tell you what to tell yer paw an' maw fer me. Say, 'Frale seen a houn' dog on his scent, an' he's gone home to git shet of him.'"

"Where's the 'houn' dog,' Frale?" She gazed fearfully about.

"He's gone now. He won't bite — not you, he won't."

"Oh, Frale! I wish it was a circus."

"Yas," drawled the young man, with a sullen smile curling his lips, "may be hit be a sort of a circus. Kin ye remember what I tol' you to tell yer paw?"

"You — you seen a houn' dog on — on a cent — how could he be on a cent?"

"Say, 'Frale seen a houn' dog on his scent, an' he's gone home to git shet of him.'"

"Frale seen a houn' dog on — on a — a cent, an' — an' — an' he's gone home to — to get shet of him. What's 'get shet of him,' Frale?"

"Nevah mind, honey; yer paw'll know. Run in an' tell him 'fore you forgit hit. Good-by."

She danced gayly off toward the house, but turned to call back at him, as he stood watching her. "Are you going to hit the 'houn'' dog with the pretty ball, Frale?"

"I reckon." He laughed and strode off toward the one small station in the opposite direction from the way the man had taken.

Frale knew well where he had gone. On the outskirts of the village was a small grove of sycamore and gum trees, by a little stream, where it was the custom for the mountain people to camp with their canvas-covered wagons. There they would build their fires on a charred place between stones, and heat their coffee. There they would feed their oxen or mule team, tied to the rear wheels of their wagons, with corn thrown on the ground before them. At nightfall they would crawl under the canvas cover and sleep on the corn fodder within.

Often beneath the fodder might be found a few jugs of raw corn whiskey hidden away, while the articles they had brought down for sale or barter at the village stores were placed on top in plain view. Sometimes they brought vegetables, or baskets of splints and willow withes, made by their women, or they might have a few yards of home-spun towelling.

The man Frale had seen was the older brother of his friend Ferdinand Teasley, and well Frale knew that he was camped with his ox team down by the spring, where it had

been his habit to wait for the cover of darkness, when he could steal forth and leave his jugs where the money might be found for them, placed on some rock or stump or fallen trunk half concealed by laurel shrubs. How often had the products of Frale's still been conveyed down the mountain by that same ox team, in that same unwieldy vehicle!

Giles Teasley's cabin and patch of soil, planted always to corn, was a long distance from his father's mill, and also from his brother's still, hence he could with the more safety dispose of their illicit drink.

In the slow but deadly sure manner of his people, he had but just aroused himself to the fact that his brother's murderer was still alive and the deed unavenged; and Frale knew he had come now, not to dispose of the whiskey, since the still had been destroyed, but to find his brother's slayer and accord him the justice of the hills.

To the mountain people the processes of the law seemed vague and uncertain. They preferred their own methods. A well-loaded gun, a sure aim, and a few months of hiding among relatives and friends until the vigilance of the emissaries of the law had subsided was the rule with them. Thus had Frale's father twice escaped either prison or the rope, and during the last four years of his life he had never once ventured from his mountain home for a day at the settlements below; while among his friends his prowess and his skill in evading pursuit were his glory.

Now it was Frale's thought to dare the worst, — to walk to the station like any village youth, buy his ticket, and take the train for Carew's Crossing, and from there make his way to his haunt while yet Giles Teasley was taking his first sleep.

He reasoned, and rightly, that his enemy would linger about several days searching for him, and never dream of his having made his escape by means of the train. Since the first scurry of search was over, it was no longer the officers of the law Frale feared, but this same lank, ill-favored mountaineer, who was now warming his coffee and eating his raw salt pork and corn-bread by the stream, while his drooling cattle stood near, sleepily chewing their cuds.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH JERRY CAREW GIVES DAVID HIS VIEWS ON FUTURE PUNISHMENT, AND LITTLE HOYLE PAYS HIM A VISIT AND IS MADE HAPPY

UNCLE JERRY CAREW had led David's horse down to the station ready saddled to meet him, according to agreement, and side by side they rode back, the old man beguiling the way with talk of mountain affairs most interesting to the young doctor, who led him on from tales of his own youthful prowess, "when catamounts and painters war nigh as frequent as woodchucks is now," until he felt he knew pretty well the history of all the mountain side.

"Yas, when I war a littlin', no highah'n my horse's knees, I kin remember thar war a gatherin' fer a catamount hunt on Reed's Hill ovah to'ds Pisgah. Catamounts war mighty pesterin' creeters them days. Ev'y man able to tote a gun war thar. Ol' man Caswell — that war Miz Merlin — she war only a mite of a baby then — her gran'-paw, he war the oldest man in th' country; he went an' carried his rifle his paw fit in th' Revolution with. He fit at King's Mountain, an' all about here he fit."

"Did he fight in the Civil War, too?"

"Her gran'paw's paw? No. He war too ol' fer that, but his gran'son Caswell, he fit in hit, an' he nevah come back, neither. Ol' Miz Caswell — Cassandry Merlin's gran'maw, she lived a widow nigh on to thirty year. She an' her daughter — that's ol' Miz Farwell that is now — they lived thar an' managed the place ontwell she married Merlin."

"You knew her first husband, then?"

"Yas, know him? Ev'ybody knew Thad Merlin. He come f'om ovah Pisgah way, an' he took Marthy thar. Hit's quare how things goes. I always liked Thad Merlin. The' wa'n't no harm in him."

David saw a quaint, whimsical smile play about the old

man's mouth. "He war a preacher — kind of a mixtur of a preacher an' teacher an' hunter. Couldn't anybody beat him huntin' — and farmin' — well he could farm, too, — better'n most. He done well whatever he done, but he had a right quare way. He built that thar rock wall an' he 'lowed he'd have hit run plumb 'round the place.

"He war a fiddler, and he'd build awhile, and fetch his fiddle — he warn't right strong — an' then he'd set thar on the wall an' fiddle to the birds; an' the wild creeturs, they'd come an' hear to him. I seen squerrels settin' on end hearkin' to him, myself. Arter a while, folks begun to think 'at he didn't preach the right kind of religion, an' they wouldn't go to hear him no more without hit war to listen did he say anythin' they could fin' fault with. 'Pears like they got in that-a-way they didn' go fer nothin' else. Hit cl'ar plumb broke him all up. He quit preachin' an' took more to fiddlin', an' he sorter grew puny, an' one day jes' natch'ly lay down an' died, all fer nothin', 'at anybody could see."

"What was the matter with his preaching?" asked David, and again the whimsical smile played around the old man's mouth, and his thin lips twitched.

"I reckon thar wa'n't 'nuff hell 'n' damnation in hit. Our people here on the mountain, they're right kind an' soft therselves. They don't whop ther chillen, nor do nothin' much 'cept a shootin' now an' then, but that's only amongst the men. The women tends mostly to the religion, an' they likes a heap o' hell 'n' damnation. Hit sorter stirs 'em up an' gives 'em somethin' to chaw on, an' keeps 'em contented like. They has somethin' to threat'n ther men folks with an' keep ther chillen straight on, an' a place to sen' ther neighbors to when they don't suit. Yas, hit's right handy fer th' women. I reckon they couldn't git on without hit."

"Do they think they will have bodies that can be hurt by any such thing in the next world?"

"I reckon so. But preacher Merlin, he said that thar war paths o' light an' paths o' darkness, an' that eve'y man he 'bided right whar he war at when he died. Ef he hed tuk the path o' darkness, thar he war in hit; but ef he hed tuk the path o' light whar war heaven, then he war thar. An' he said the Lord nevah made no hell, hit war jes'

our own selves made sech es that, an' he took an' cut that thar place cl'ar plumb out'n the Scripturs an' the worl' to come. But he sure hed a heap o' larnin', only some said a sight on hit war heathen, an' that war why he lef' all the hell an' damnation outen his religion."

Thus enlightened concerning many things, both of this particular bit of mountain world, which was all the world to his companion, and of the world to come, Thryng rode on, quietly amused.

Sometimes he dismounted to investigate plants new to him, or to gather a bit of moss or fungi or parasite — anything that promised an elucidating hour with his splendid microscope. For these he always carried at the pommel of his saddle an air-tight box. The mountain people supposed he collected such things for the compounding of his drugs.

When they reached the Fall Place, David continued along the main road below and took a trail farther on, merely a foot trail little used, to his eyrie. He had not seen Cassandra since they had walked together down from Hoke Belew's place. He had gone to Farington partly to avoid seeing her, nor did he wish to see her again until he should have so mastered himself as to betray nothing by his manner that might embarrass her or remind her painfully of their last interview, knowing he must eliminate self to reëstablish their previous relations.

David rode directly to his log stable, put up his horse, then unslung his box and walked with it toward his cabin. Suddenly he stopped. From the thick shrubbery where he stood he could see in at the large window where his microscope was placed quite through his cabin into the light, white canvas room beyond. Before the fireplace, clearly relieved against the whiteness of the farther room, stood Cassandra, gazing intently at something she held in her hand. David recognized it as a small, framed picture of his mother — a delicately painted miniature. He kept it always on the shelf near which she was standing. He saw her reach up and replace it, then brush her hand quickly across her eyes, and knew she had been weeping. He was ashamed to stand there watching her, but he could not move. Always, it seemed to him, she was being presented to him thus strongly against a surrounding halo

of light, revealing every gracious line of her figure and her sweet, clean profile.

He turned his eyes away, but as quickly gazed again; she had disappeared. He waited, and again she passed between his eyes and the light, here and there, moving quickly about, seeing that all was in order, as her custom was when she knew him to be absent.

He saw her brushing about the hearth, carefully wiping the dust from his disordered table, lifting the books, touching everything tenderly and lightly. His flute lay there. She took it in her hands and looked down at it solemnly, then slowly raised it to her lips. What? Was she going to try to play upon it? No, but she kissed it. Again and again she kissed the slender, magic wand, hurriedly, then laid it very gently down and with one backward glance walked swiftly out of the cabin and away from him, down the trail, with long, easy steps. Only once more she drew her hand across her eyes, and with head held high moved rapidly on. Never did she look to the right or the left or she must have seen him as he stood, scarcely breathing and heard beset to hold himself back and allow her to pass him thus.

Now he knew that she had been deeply stirred by him, and the revelation fell upon his spirit, filling him with a joy more intense than anything he had ever felt or experienced before, so poignantly sweet that it hurt him.

Had he indeed entered into her dreams and become an undercurrent in her life even as she had in his, and did her soul and body ache for him as his for her?

Then he suffered remorse for what he had done. How long she had defended herself by that wall of impersonality with which she had surrounded herself! He had beaten down the ramparts and trampled in the garden of her soul.

As he stood in the door of his cabin, the place seemed to breathe of her presence. She had made a veritable bower of it for his return. Every sweet thing she had gathered for him, as if, out of her love and her sorrow, she had meant to offering to him an especial blessing.

A yellow basin filled with wild forget-me-nots stood on the shelf before his mother's picture. Ferns and vines fell about the stone mantle, and in earthen jars of mountain ware were the early rhododendron, with its delicate, pearly

caps

pink blossoms, filled the dark corners. Masses of the plumed white ash shook feathery tassels along the walls, making the air sweet with their fragrance. Ah, how clean and fresh everything was! All his disorder was set to rights, and fresh linen was on his bed in his canvas room.

Even his table was laid with his small store of dishes, and food placed upon it, still covered in the basket he was now so accustomed to see. Sweet and dainty it all was. He had only to light the fat pine sticks laid beneath the kettle swung above and make his tea, and his meal was ready. Had she divined he would not stop at the Fall Place this time, when in the past it had been his custom to do so? Ah, she knew; for is not the little winged god a wonderful teacher?

Thryng was humbled in the very dust and ashes of repentance as he sat down to his late dinner. The fragrance in the room, all he ate, everything he touched, filled his senses with her; and he — he had only brought her sorrow. He had come into her life but to bruise her spirit and leave her sad at heart with a deep sadness he dared not and could not alleviate. He lifted a pale purple orchid she had placed in a tumbler at his hand and examined it. Evidently she had thought this the choicest of all the woodland treasures she had brought him, and had placed it there, a sweet message. What should he do? Ah, what could he do? He must not see her yet — at least not until to-morrow.

Later, David brought in his specimens and occupied himself with his microscope. He had begun a careful study of certain destructive things. Even here in the wild he found them, evil and unwholesome, clinging to the weak and strong, slowly but surely sapping the vitality of those who gave them life. Every evil, he thought, must, in the economy of nature, have its antidote. So, with the ardore of the scientist, he divided with care the nasty, pasty growth he had found and prepared his plates. Systematically he made drawings and notes as he studied the magnified atoms beneath his powerful lens, and when he sat absorbed in his work, Hoyle's childish voice piped, behim from the doorway.

"Howdy, Doctah Thryng."

"Why, hello! Howdy!" said David, without looking up from his work.

"What you got in that thar gol' machine? Kin I look, too?"

"What have I got? Why — I've got a bit of the devil in here."

"Whar'd you git him? Huh?"

"Oh, I found him along the road between here and the station."

"Did — did he come on the cyars with you? Whar war he at? Hu come he in thar?" David did not reply for an instant, and the awed child drew a step nearer. "Whar war he at?" he insisted. "Hu come he in thar?"

"He was hanging to a bush as I came along, and I put him in my box and brought him home and cut him up and put a little bit of him in here."

Then there was silence, and David forgot the small boy until he heard a deep-drawn sigh behind him. Looking up for the first time, he saw him standing aloof, a look of terror in his wide eyes as if he fain would run away, but could not from sheer fright. Poor little mite! David in his playful speech had not dreamed of being taken in earnest. He drew the child to his side, where he cuddled gladly, nestling his twisted little body close, partly for protection, and partly in love.

"You reckon he's plumb dade?" David could feel the child's heart beating in a heavy labored way against his arm as he held him, and, pushing his papers one side, he lifted him to his knee.

"Do I reckon who's dead?" he asked absently, with his ear pressed to the child's back.

"The devil what you done brought home in yuer box."

"Dead? Oh, yes. He's dead — good and dead. Sit still a moment — so — now take a long breath. A long one — deep — that's right. Now another — so."

"What fer?"

"I want to hear your heart beat."

"Kin you hear hit?"

"Yes — don't talk, a minute, — that'll do."

"What you want to hear my heart beat fer? I kin feel hit. Kin you feel yourn? Be they more'n one devil?"

"Heaps of them."

"When I go back, you reckon I'll find 'em hanging on the bushes? Do they hang by ther tails, like 'possums does?"

Comfortable and happy where he was, the little fellow dreaded the distance he must traverse to reach his home under the peculiar phenomena of devils hanging to the bushes along his route.

"Oh, no, no. Here, I'll show you what I mean." Then he explained carefully to the child what he really meant, showing him some of the strange and beautiful ways of nature, and at last allowing him to look into the microscope to see the little cells and rays. As he patiently and kindly taught, he was pleased with the child's eager, receptive mind and naïve admiration. Towards evening Hoyle was sent home, quite at rest concerning devils and all their kin, and radiantly happy with a box of many colored pencils and a blank drawing-book, which David had brought him from Farington.

"I kin larn to make things like you b'en makin' with these, an' Cass, she'll he'p me," he cried.

"What is Cass doing to-day?" David ventured.

"She be'n up here most all mornin', an' I he'ped get the light ud fer fire, an' then she sont me home to he'p maw whilst she stayed to fix up."

"But now, I mean, when you came up here?"

"Weavin' in the loom shed. Maw, she has a lot o' little biddies. The ol' hen hatched 'em, she did."

"What have you done to your thumb?" asked David, seeing it tied about with a rag.

"I plunked hit with the hammer when I war a-makin' houses fer the biddies. I nailed 'em, I did."

"You made the chicken coops? Well, you are a clever little chap. Let me see your hand."

"Yas, maw said I war that, too."

"But you weren't very clever to do this. Whew! What did you hit your thumb like that for?"

"Dunno." He looked ruefully at the crushed member which the doctor laved gently and soothingly.

"Why didn't you come to me with it?"

"Maw 'lowed the' wa'n't no use pesterin' you with eve'ything. She tol' me eve'y man had to larn to hit a nail on the haid."

David laughed, and the child trotted away happy, his hand in a sling made of one of the doctor's linen handkerchiefs, and his box of pencils and his book hugged to his irregularly beating heart; but it was with a grave face that Thryng saw him disappear among the great masses of pink laurel bloom.

That evening, as the glow in the west deepened and died away and the stars came out one by one and sent their slender rays down upon the hills, David sat on his rock with his flute in his hand, waiting for a moment to arrive when he could put it to his lips and send out the message of glad hopes he had sent before. She had asked that one little thing, that his music might still be glad, and so for Cassandra's sake it must be.

He tried once and again, but he could not play. At last, putting away from him his repentant thoughts, he gave his heart full sway, saying to himself: "For this moment I will imagine harmlessly that my vision is all mine and my dream come true. It is the only way." Then he played as if it were he whom she had kissed so passionately, instead of his flute; and thus it was the glad notes were falling on her spirit when Frale found her.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH FRALE RETURNS AND LISTENS TO THE COMPLAINTS OF DECATUR IRWIN'S WIFE

All was quiet and lonely around Carew's Crossing when Frale dropped from the train and struck off over the mountain. Soon there would be bustle and stir and life about the place, for the hotel would be open and people would be crowding in, some to escape the heat of the far South and the low countries, some from the cities either North or South to whom the bracing air of the mountains would bring renewed vitality — business men with shattered nerves and women whose high play during the winter at the game of social life had left them nervous wrecks.

But now the beauty of the spring and the sweet silences were undisturbed by alien chatter. As yet were to be heard only the noises of the forest — of wind and stream — of bird calls and the piping of turtles and the shrilling of insects or vibrant croaking of frogs — or mayhap the occasional sound of a gun, discharged by some solitary mountain boy, regardless of game laws, to provide a supper at home, — only these, as Frale climbed rapidly away from the station toward the Fall Place, and Cassandra. He would stop there first and then strike for his old haunts and hiding-places.

He felt a leaping joy in his veins to be again among his hills. How lonely he had been for them he had not known until now, when, with lifted head and bounding heart, he trod lightly and easily the difficult way. And yet the undercurrent of a tragedy lay quiet beneath his joy and haunted him, keeping him to the trails above, — the secret paths which led circuitously to his home, — even while the thought of Cassandra made his heart buoyant and eager.

The sight of Doctor Thryng who during these months had been near her — perhaps seeing her daily — aroused all the primitive jealousy of his nature. He would go now and persuade her to marry him and stand by him until he

could fight his way through to the unquestioned right to live there as his father had done, defying any who would interfere with his course. Had he not a silver bullet for the heart of the man who would dare contest his rights? It only remained for him to meet Giles Teasley face to face to settle the matter forever.

Since it was purely a mountain affair, and the officers of the law had already searched to their satisfaction, there was little chance that the pursuit would be renewed by the State. It would, however, be impossible for him to go back to the Fall Place and live there openly until the last member of the Teasley family capable of wreaking vengeance on his head had been settled with; but as the father was crippled with rheumatism and could do no more than totter about his mill and talk, only this one brother was left with whom to deal. Now that Frale was back in his own hills again, all terror slipped from him, and the old excitement in the presence of danger to be met, or avoided, stimulated him to a feeling of exuberance and triumph. With childlike facility he tossed aside the thought of his promise to Cassandra. It all seemed to him as a dream — all the horror and the remorse. Time had quickly dulled this last.

"Ef I hadn't 'a' killed Ferd, he would 'a' shot me. Anyhow, he hadn't ought to 'a' riled me that-a-way."

He thought with shame of how he had sat cowering at the head of the fall, and had hurled his own dog to destruction, in his fear. "I war jes' plumb crazy," he soliloquized.

As to how he could deal with Cassandra, he did not as yet know, but he would find a way. In his heart, he reached out to her and already possessed her. His blood leaped madly through his veins that he was so soon to see her and touch her. Have her he would, if he must continue to kill his way to her through an army of opponents.

The evening was falling, and, imagining they would all be sleeping, he meant to creep quietly up and spend the night in the loom shed. There was no dog there now to disturb them with joyful bark of recognition. At last he found himself above the home, where, by striking through the undergrowth a short distance, he would come out by

the great holly tree near the head of the fall. Already he could hear the welcome sound of rushing water.

He drew nearer through the thick laurel and azalea shrubs now in full bloom; their pollen clung to his clothing as he brushed among them. Cautiously he approached the spot which recalled to him the emotions he had experienced there — now throbbing through him anew. He peered into the gathering dusk with eager eyes as if he thought to find her still there. Ah, he could crush her in his mad joy!

Suddenly he paused and listened. Other sounds than those of the night and the running water fell on his ear — sounds deliciously sweet and thrilling, filling all the air, mingling with the rushing of the fall and accenting its flow. From whence did they come — those new sounds? He had never heard them before. Did they drop from the sky — from the stars twinkling brightly down on him — now faint and far as if born in heaven — now near and clear — silvery clear and strong and sweet — penetrating his very soul and making every nerve quiver to their pulsating rhythm? He felt a certain fear of a new kind creep tinglingly through him, holding him cold and still — for the moment breathless. Was she there? Had she died, and was this her spirit trying to speak?

Very quietly he drew nearer to the great rock. Yes, she was there, standing with her back to the silvery gray bole of the holly tree, her face lifted toward the mountain top and her expression rapt and listening — holy and pure — far removed from him as was the star above the peak toward which her gaze was turned. He could not touch her, nor crush her to him as a moment before he had felt he must, but he slowly approached.

She heard his step and then saw him waiting there in the dim light of the starry dusk. For an instant she regarded him in silence, then she essayed to speak, but her lips only trembled over the words voicelessly. He could not see her emotion, but he felt it, although her stillness made her seem calm. Hungrily he stood and watched her. At last she spoke:—

"Why, Frale, Frale!"

"Hit's me, Cass."

"Have — have you been down to the house, Frale?"

"Naw, I jes' come this-a-way from the station."

"Is it — is it safe for you to come here, Frale?"

She stood a short distance from him, speaking so softly, and yet he could not touch her; his hands seemed numb, and his breath came pantingly.

"I reckon hit's safe here as thar," he said huskily. "An' I'm come to stay, too."

"Then let's go down to mother. Likely she's a-bed by now, but she'll be right glad to see you. She can walk a little now." She hastened to fill the moments with words, anything to divert that fixed gaze and take his thoughts from her. Instinctively she groped thus for time, she who like a deer would flee if flight were possible, even while her heart welled with pity for him. "Come. You can talk with her whilst I get you some supper." She felt his pent-up emotion and secretly feared it, but held herself bravely. "Hoyle will nigh jump out of his skin, he'll be that glad you come back."

He stood stubbornly where he was, and lifted his hand to grasp her arm, but she glided on just beyond his reach, either not seeing it, or avoiding it, he could not decide which, and still she said, "Come, Frale." He followed stumblingly in her wake, as a man follows an ignis fatuus, unconscious of the roughness of the way or of the steps he was taking — and the flute notes followed them from above — sweetly — mockingly, as it seemed to him. What were they? Why were they? How came Cassandra there listening? He could stand this mystery no longer — and he cried out to her.

"Cass, hear. Listen to that."

"Yes, Frale." She spoke wearily, but did not pause.

"Wait, Cass. What be hit, ye reckon? Hit sure hain't no fiddle. Thar! Heark to hit. Whar be hit at?"

"I reckon it's up yonder at Doctor Thryng's cabin. He has a little pipe like, that he blows on and it makes music like that."

"An' you clum' up thar to heark to him?" He bounded forward in the darkness and walked close to her. She quivered like a leaf, but held her voice low and steady as she replied.

"No, Frale. I go there evenings when I'm not too tired. I've been going there ever since you left to —"

"That doctah, he's be'n castin' a spell on you, Cass. I kin see hit — how you walkin' off an' nevah 'low me to touch you. Ye hain't said howd'y to me nor how you glad I come. You like a col' white drift o' snow blowin' on ahead o' me. You hain't no human girl like you used to be. I got somethin' to put a spell on him, too, ef he don't watch out."

He spoke in his mild, low-voiced drawl, but he kept close to her side, and she could hear his breathing, quick and panting. She felt as if a tiger were keeping pace with her, and she knew the sinister meaning beneath his words. She knew that all she could do now was to take him back to his promise and hold him to it.

"There's no such thing as spell casting, Frale. You know that, and you have my promise and I have yours. Have you forgot? Talking that way seems like you have forgot." She walked on rapidly, taking him nearer and nearer their home, and in her haste she stumbled. In an instant his arm was thrown around her, holding her on her feet.

"Look at you now, like to fall cl'ar headlong, runnin' that-a-way to get shet o' me. 'Pears like you mad that I come."

He held her back, and they went slowly, but he did not release her, nor did she struggle futilely against his strength, knowing it wiser to continue calmly leading him on; but she could not reply. The start of her fall and her wildly beating heart rendered her breathless and weak.

"I tell you that thar doctah man, he have put a spell on you. He done drawed you up thar to hear to him. I seed you lookin' like he'd done drawed yuer soul outen yuer body. I have heard o' sech. He's be'n down to Bishop Towahs', too, whar I be'n workin' at. I seed him watchin' me like he come to spy on me, an' he no sooner gone than I seed that thar Giles Teasley sneakin' 'long the fence lookin' over an' searchin' eve'y place like he war a-hungerin' fer a sight o' me." He stopped and swallowed angrily. They had arrived at the trough of running water, and she breathed easier to find herself so near her haven.

"What have you done with your dog, Frale? You reckon he followed you off? I haven't seen him since you left."

He released her then and, stooping to the water-pipe, drank a long draft, and thrust his head beneath it, allowing the water to drench his thick hair. Then he stood a moment, shaking his curling locks like a spaniel.

"Wait here. I'll fetch a towel." She hastened within. "Mother, Frale's come back," she said quietly, not to awaken Hoyle; then returned and tossed him the towel which he caught and rubbed vigorously over his head and face.

"Now you are like yourself again, Frale."

"Yas, I'm here an' I'm myself, I reckon. Who'd ye think I be?" He caught her and kissed her, and, with his arm about her, entered the cabin.

His mood changed with childish ease according to whatever the moments brought him. Cassandra lighted a candle, for now that the days had grown warm, the fire was allowed to go out unless needed for cooking. His stepmother had roused herself and peered at him from out her dark corner, where little Hoyle lay sleeping soundly in the farther side of her bed. Frale strode across the uneven floor and kissed her also, resoundingly. Astounded, she dropped back on her pillow.

"What ails ye, Frale!" The mountain people are for the most part too reserved to be lavish with their kisses.

"Nothin' ails me. I'm kissin' you fer Cass's sake. Me an' her's goin' to get jined an' set up togethah. I'm come back fer to marry with her, and we're goin' ovah t'othah side Lone Pine, an' I'm goin' to build a cabin thar. That's how I'm kissin' you. Will you have anothah, or shall I give hit to Cass?"

"You hush an' go 'long," said the mother, half contemptuously.

"Frale's making fool talk, mothah. Don't give heed to him. He's light-headed, I reckon, and I'm going to get him something to eat right quick."

"I 'low he be light-headed. Nobody's goin' to git Cass whilst I'm livin', 'thout he's got more'n a cabin ovah t'othah side Lone Pine. She's right well off here, an' here she'll 'bide."

Frale turned darkly on the mother. "I reckon you'd bettah give heed to me mor'n to her," he said, in the low drawl which boded much with him.

Cassandra, on her knees at the hearth, was arranging sticks of fat pine to light the fire. Her hands shook as she held them. This Frale saw, and his eyes gleamed. He came to her side and, kneeling also, took them from her.

"Hit's my place to do this fer you now, Cass. F'om now on — I reckon. I'll hang the kittle fer ye, too, an' fetch the water."

The mother stared at them in silence, and Cassandra, taking up the coffee-pot, rose and went out. When she returned, the fire was crackling merrily, and the great kettle swung over it. Hoyle was up and seated on his half-brother's knee. Cassandra's eyes looked heavy and showed traces of tears.

Frale saw it all, with eyes gleaming blue through narrowly drawn lids. His lips quivered a little as he talked with Hoyle. He drew out his money for the child to count over gleefully, thus diverting himself with the boy, while he watched Cassandra furtively. He decided to say no more at present until she should have had time to adjust her mind to the thought he had so daringly announced to her mother. The two cakes little Dorothy had given him he took from his bundle and gave to Hoyle, then carried him back and put him to bed and told him to sleep again.

For all of her promise, Cassandra had not expected this to come upon her so suddenly, like lightning out of a clear sky, startling her very soul with fear. As Frale ate what she set before him, she went over to the bedside, and sat there holding her mother's hand and talking in low tones, while Hoyle, with wide eyes, strove to hear.

"Be hit true, what he says, Cass?"

"Not all, mother. I never told him I would go and live over beyond Lone Pine. I meant always to live right here with you, but I am promised to him. I gave him my word that night he left, to get him to go and save him. Oh, God! Mother, I didn't guess it would come so soon. He promised me he would repent his deed and live right."

The mother brightened and drew her daughter down and spoke low in her ear. "Make him keep to his promise first, child. Yuer safe thar. I reckon he's doin' a heap o' repentin' this-a-way. I ain' goin' 'low you throw you'se'f away on no Farwell, ef he be good-lookin', 'thout he holds to his word good fer a year. Hit's jes' the way his paw

done me. He gin me his word 'at he'd stop 'stillin' an' drinkin', an' he helt to hit fer three months, an' then he come on me this-a-way an' I married him, an' he opened up his still again in three weeks, an' thar he went his own way f'om that day."

Cassandra rose and went to the door. "I'm going to make you a bed in the loom shed like I made it for the doctor. There is no bed up garret now. I emptied out all the ticks and thought I'd have them fresh filled against you come back — but I've been that busy."

Soon he followed her out. "I reckon I won't sleep thar whar that doctah have slep'. He might put a spell on me, too," he said, standing in the door of the shed and looking in on her. The night was lighter now, for the full moon had glided up over the hills, and she worked by its light streaming though the open door.

"I can't see with you standing there, Frale. I reckon you'll have to sleep here, because it's too late to fill your bed to-night."

"Oh, leave that be and come and sit here with me," he said, dropping on the step where the doctor had sat when she opened her heart to him and told him about her father. It all surged back upon her now. She could not sit there with Frale. "I'll make my bed myself, an' I'll — I'll sleep wharevah you want me to, ef hit's up on the roof or out yandah in the water trough. Come, sit."

"We'll go back on the porch, and I'll take mother's chair. I'm right tired."

"When we git in our own cabin ovah t'othah side Lone Pine, you won't have nothin' to do only tend on me," he said, drawing her to him. He led her across the open space and placed her gently in her mother's chair on the little porch.

"Now, Frale, sit down there and listen," she said, pointing to the step at her feet where Thryng had sat only a few days before to make out the lease of their land. Everything seemed to cry out to her of him to-night, but she must steel her heart against the thought.

"I'm going to talk to you straight, just what I mean, Frale. You've been talking as you pleased in there, and I 'lowed you to, I was that set back. Anyway, I'd rather

talk to you alone. Frale, our promise was made before God, and you know I will keep to mine. But you must keep to yours, too. Listen at me. Mrs. Towers wrote me you had been drunk twice. Is that keeping your promise to leave whiskey alone? Is it, Frale?"

"You have somebody down thar watchin' me, an' I hain't nobody a-watchin' you," he said sullenly. She felt degraded by his words.

"Frale, do you know me all these years to think such as that of me now?"

"I tell you he have put a spell on you. I kin feel hit an' see hit. Hit ain't your fault, Cass. I'd put one on you myself, ef I could. Anyhow, I'll take you out of this fer he have done hit."

"Do you never say that word to me again as long as you live, Frale," she said sternly. "Listen at me, I say. You go back there and work like you said you would —"

"Didn't I tell you that thar houn' dog Giles Teasley war on my scent? I seen him. I got to come back ontwell I c'n git shet o' him."

"And that means another murder! Oh, Frale, Frale!" She covered her face with her hands and moaned. Then they sat silent awhile.

After a little she lifted her head. "Frale, I'll go over to Teasleys' and beg for them to leave you be. I'll beg Giles Teasley on my knees, I will. Then when you have bided your year and kept your promise like you swore before God, I'll marry you like I promised, and we'll live here and keep the old place like it ought to be kept. You hear, Frale? Good night, now. It's only fair you should give heed to me, Frale, if I do that for you. Good night."

She glided past him into the house like a wraith, and he rose without a word of reply and stretched himself on the half-made bed in the loom shed, as he was. Sullen and angry, he lay far into the night with the moonlight streaming over him, but he did not sleep, and his mood only grew more bitter and dangerous.

When the first streak of dawn was drawn across the eastern sky, he rose unrefreshed, and began a search, feeling along the rafters high above the bags of cotton. Presently he drew forth an ancient, long-barrelled rifle, and

taking it out into the light, examined it carefully. He rubbed and cleaned the barrel and polished the stock and oiled the hammer and trigger. Then he brought from the same hiding-place a horn of powder and gun wadding, and at last took from his pocket the silver bullet, with which he loaded his old weapon even as he had seen it charged in past days by his father's hand.

Below the house, built over a clear welling spring which ran in a bright little rivulet to the larger stream, was the spring-house. Here, after the warm days came, the milk and butter were kept, and here Frale sauntered down — his gun slung across his arm, his powder-horn at his belt, in his old clothes — with his trousers thrust in his boot-tops — to search for provisions for the day and his breakfast as well. He had no mind to allow the family to oppose his action or reason him out of his course.

He found a jug of buttermilk placed there the evening before for Hoyle to carry to the doctor in the morning, and slung it by a strap over his shoulder. In one of the sheds lay two chickens, ready dressed to be cut up for the frying-pan, and one of these, with a generous strip of salt pork from the keg of dry salt where it was kept, he dropped in a sack. He would not enter the house for corn-bread, even though he knew he was welcome to all the home afforded, but planned to arrive at some mountain cabin where friends would give him what he required to complete his stock of food. His gun would provide him with an occasional meal of game, and he thus felt himself prepared for as long a period of ambush as might be necessary.

Before sunrise he was well on his way over the mountain. He did not attempt to go directly to his old haunt, but turned aside and took the trail leading along the ridge — the same Thryng and Cassandra had taken to go to the cabin of Decatur Irwin. Frale had no definite idea of going there, but took the high ridge instinctively. So long had he been in the low country that he craved now to reach the heights where he might see the far blue distances and feel the strong sweet air blowing past him. It was much the same feeling that had caused him to thrust his head under the trough of running water the evening before.

As a wild creature loves the freedom of the plains, or

an eagle rises and circles about in the blue ether aimless and untrammelled, so this man of the hills moved now in his natural environment, living in the present moment, glad to be above the low levels and out from under all restraint, seeing but a little way into his future, content to satisfy present needs and the cravings of his strong, virile body.

Moments of exaltation and aspiration came to him, as they must come to every one, but they were moments only, and were quickly swept aside and but vaguely comprehended by him. As a child will weep one minute over some creature his heedlessness has hurt and the next forget it all in the pursuit of some new delight, so this child of nature took his way, swayed by his moods and desires — an elemental force, like a swollen torrent taking its vengeful way — forgetful of promises — glad of freedom — angry at being held in restraint, and willing to crush or tear away any opposing force.

At last, breakfastless and weary after his long climb, his sleepless night, and the depression following his talk with Cassandra the evening before, he paused at the edge of the descent, loath to leave the open height behind him, and stretched himself under a great black cedar to rest. As he lay there dreaming and scheming, with half-shut eyes, he spied below him the bare red patch of soil around the cabin of Decatur Irwin. Instantly he rose and began rapidly to descend.

Decatur was away. He had got a "job of hauling," his wife said, and had to be away all day, but she willingly set herself to bake a fresh corn-cake and make him coffee. He had already taken a little of his buttermilk, but he did not care for raw salt pork alone. He wanted his corn-bread and coffee, — the staple of the mountaineer.

She talked much, in a languid way, as she worked, and he sat in the doorway. Now and then she asked questions about his home and "Cassandry," which he answered evasively. She gossiped much about all the happenings and sayings of her neighbors far and near, and complained much, when she came to take pay from him for what she provided, of the times which had come upon them since "Cate had hurt his foot." She told how that fool doctor had come there and taken "hit off,

makin' out like Cate'd die of hit ef he didn't," and how "Cassandry Merlin had done cheated her into goin' off so 't she could bide thar at the cabin alone with that doctah man herself an' he'p him do hit."

With her snuff stick between her yellow teeth and her numerous progeny squatting in the dirt all about the doorway, idly gazing at Frale, she retailed her grievances without reserve. How the wife of Hoke Belew had been "ailin'," and Cassandra had "be'n thar ev'y day keerin' fer her. I 'low she jes' goes 'cause she 'lows she'll see that doctah man thar an' ride back with him like she done when she brung him here," said the pallid, spiteful creature, and spat as she talked. "She nevah done that fer me. I be'n sick a heap o' times, an' she hain't nevah come nigh me to do a lick."

Frale was annoyed to hear Cassandra thus spoken against, for was she not his own? He chose to defend her, while purposely concealing his bitter anger against the doctor. "The' hain't nothin' agin Cassandry. She's sorter kin to me, an' I 'low the' hain't."

"Naw," said the woman, changing instantly at the threatening tone, "the' hain't nothin' agin her. I reckon he tells her whar to go, an' she jes' goes like he tells her."

Frale threw his sack over his shoulder and started on in silence, and the woman smiled evilly after him as she sat there and licked her lips, and chewed on her snuff stick and spat.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH DAVID THRYNG MEETS AN ENEMY

THE next day David gave his attention to the letters which he found awaiting him. One was from Doctor Hoyle in Canada. He had but just returned from a visit to England, and it was full of news of David's family there.

"Your two cousins and your brother are gone with their regiments to South Africa," he wrote. "They are jubilant to be called to active service, as they ought to be, but your mother is heartbroken over their departure. You stay where you are, my boy. She is glad enough to have you out of England now, and far from the temptation which besets youth in times of war. It has already caused a serious blood-letting for Old England. I have grave doubts about this contention. In these days there ought to be a way of preventing such disaster. Write to your mother and comfort her heart, — she needs it. I was careful not to betray to her what your condition has been, as I discovered you had not done so. Hold fast and fight for health, and be content. Your recuperative power is good."

David was filled with contrition as he opened his mother's letter, which was several weeks old and had come by way of Canada, since she did not know he had gone South. For some time he had sent home only casual notes, partly to save her anxiety, and partly because writing was irksome to him unless he had something particularly pleasant to tell her. His plans and actions had been so much discussed at home and he had been considered so censurably odd — so different from his relatives and friends in his opinions, and so impossible of comprehension (which branded him in his own circle as being quite at fault) — that he had long ago abandoned

all effort to make himself understood by them, and had retired behind his mask of reserve and silence to pursue his own course undisturbed. Thus, at best, an occasional perfunctory letter that all was well with him was the sum total of news they received. Thryng had no money anxieties for his family. The needs of his mother and his sister — not yet of age — were amply provided for by a moderate annuity, while his brother had his position in the army, and help from his uncle besides. For himself, he had saved enough, with his simple tastes and much hard work, to tide him over this period of rest.

David sat now and turned his mother's letter over and over. He read and reread it. It was very sad. Her splendid boys both gone from her, one possibly never to return — neither of them married and with no hope of grandchildren to solace her declining years. "Stay where you are, David," she wrote; "Doctor Hoyle tells us you are doing well. Don't, oh, don't enter the army! One son I have surrendered to my country's service; let me feel that I still have one on whom I may depend to care for Laura and me in the years to come. We do not need you now, but some day we may."

David's quandary was how to give her as much of his confidence as filial duty required without betraying himself so far as to arouse the antagonistic comment of her immediate circle upon his course.

At last he found a way. Telling her he did not know how soon he might return to Canada, he requested her to continue to address him there. He then filled his letter with loving thoughts for her and Laura, and a humorous description of what he had seen and experienced in the "States" and the country about him, all so foreign and utterly strange to her as to be equal to a small manuscript romance. It was a cleverly written letter, so hiding the vital matters of his soul, which he could not reveal even to the most loving scrutiny, that all her motherly intuition failed to read between the lines. The humorous portions she gave to the rector's wife, — her most intimate friend, — and the dear son's love expressed therein she treasured in her heart and was comforted.

Then David rode away up the mountain without descending to his little farm. He craved to get far into

the very heart of the wildest parts, for with the letters the old conventional and stereotyped ideals seemed to have intruded into his cabin.

He passed the home of Hoke Belew and stopped there to see that all was well with them. The rose vine covering the porch roof was filled with pink blossoms, hundreds of them swinging out over his head. The air was sweet with the odor of honeysuckle. The old locust tree would soon be alive with bees, for it was already budded. He took the baby in his arms and saw that its cheeks were growing round and plump, and that the young mother looked well and happy, and he was glad.

"Take good care of them, Hoke; they are worth it," he said to the young father, as he passed him coming in from the field.

"I will that," said the man.

"Can you tell me how to reach a place called 'Wild Cat Hole'? I have a fancy to do a little exploring."

"Waal, hit's sorter round about. I don't guess ye c'n find hit easy." The man spat as if reluctant to give the information asked, which only stimulated David all the more to find the spot.

"Keep right on this way, do I?"

"Yas, you keep on fer a spell, an' then you turn to th' right an' foller the stream fer a spell, an' you keep on follerin' hit off an' on till you git thar. Ye'll know hit when you do git thar, but th' still's all broke up."

"Oh, I don't care a rap about the still."

"Naw, I reckon not. Better light an' have dinner 'fore you go on. Azalie, keep the doc to dinner. I'm comin' in a minute," he called to his wife, who stood smiling in the doorway.

David willingly accepted the proffered hospitality, as he had often done before, knowing it would be well after nightfall ere he could return to his cabin, and rode back to the house.

While Azalea prepared dinner, Hoke sat in the open door and held his baby and smoked. David took a splint-bottomed chair out on the porch and smoked with him, watching pleasantly the pride of the young father, who allowed the tiny fist to close tightly around his great work-roughened finger.

"Look a-thar now. See that hand. Hit ain't bigger'n a bumble-bee, an' see how he kin hang on."

"Yes," said David, absently regarding them. "He's a fine boy."

"He sure is. The' hain't no finer on this mountain."

Azalea came and looked down over her husband's shoulder. "Don't do that-a-way, Hoke. You'll wake him up, bobbin' his arm up an' down like you a-doin'. Hoke, he's that proud, you can't touch him."

"You hear that, Doc? Azalie, she's that sot on him she's like to turn me outen the house fer jes' lookin' at him. She 'lows he'll grow up a preacher, on account o' the way he kin holler an' thrash with his fists, but I tell her hit hain't nothin' but madness an' devilment 'at gits in him."

With a mother's superior smile playing about her lips, she glanced understandingly at David, and went on with her cooking. As they came in to the table, she called David's attention to a low box set on rockers, and, taking the baby from her husband's arms, carefully placed him, still asleep, in the quaint nest.

"Hoke made that hisself," she said with pride. "And Cassandry, she made that kiver."

Thryng touched the cover reverently, bending over it, and left the cradle rocking as he sat down at Hoke's side and began to put fresh butter between his hot biscuit, as he had learned to do. His mother would have flung up her hands in horror had she seen him doing this, or could she have known how many such he had devoured since coming to recuperate in these mountain wilds.

The home was very bare and simple, but sweet and clean, and love was in it. To sit there for a while with the child-like young couple, enjoying their home and their baby and the hospitality generously offered according to their ability, warmed David's heart, and he rode away happier than he came.

With mind absorbed and idle rein, he allowed his horse to stray as he would, while his thoughts and memory played strange tricks, presenting contrasting pictures to his inward vision. Now it was his mother reading by the evening lamp, carelessly scanning a late magazine, only half interested, her white hair arranged in shining puffs high on her head, and soft lace — old lace — falling

from open sleeves over her shapely arms; and Laura, red-cheeked and plump, curled, feet and all, in a great lounging chair, poring over a novel and yawning now and then, her dark hair carelessly tied, with straight, straying ends hanging about her face as he had many a time seen her after playing a game of hockey with her active, romping friends.

His mother and Laura were the only ones at home now, since the big elder brother was gone. Of course they would miss him and be sad sometimes, but Laura would enjoy life as much as ever and keep the home bright with youth. Even as he thought of them, the room faded and his own cabin appeared as he had seen it the day before, through the open window, with Cassandra moving about in her quiet, gliding way, haloed with light. Again he would see a picture of another room, all white and gold, with slight French chairs and tables, and couches and cushions, and candelabra of quivering crystals, with pale green walls and gold-framed paintings, and a great, three-cornered piano, massive and dark, where a slight, fair girl sat idly playing tinkling music in keeping with herself and the room, but quite out of keeping with the splendid instrument.

He saw people all about her, chatting, laughing, sipping tea, and eating thin bread and butter. He saw, as if from a distance, another man, himself, in that room, standing near the piano to turn her music, while the tinkling runs and glib, expressionless trills wove in and out, a ceaseless nothing.

She spent years learning to do that, he thought, and any amount of money. Oh, well. She had it to spend, and of what else were they capable — those hands? He could see them fluttering caressingly over the keys, pink, slender, pretty, — and then he saw other hands, somewhat work-worn, not small nor yet too large, but white and shapely. Ah! Of what were they not capable? And the other girl in coarse white homespun, seated before the fire in Hoke Belew's cabin, holding in her arms the small bundle — and her smile, so rare and fleeting!

He saw again the handsome sullen youth in Bishop Towers' garden, regarding him over the hedge with narrowed eyes, and his whole nature rebelled and cried out as before, "What a waste!" Why should he allow it to

go on? He must thrash this thing out once for all before he returned to his cabin — the right and the wrong of the case before he should see her again, while as yet he could be engineer of his own forces and hold his hand on the throttle to guide himself safely and wisely.

Could he succeed in influencing her to set her young lover's claims one side? But in his heart he knew if such a thing were possible, she would not be herself; she would be another being, and his love for her would cease. No, he must see her but little, and let the tragedy go on even as the bishop had said — go on as if he never had known her. As soon as possible he must return and take up his work where he could not see the slow wreck of her life. A heavy dread settled down upon him, and he rode on with bowed head, until his horse stumbled and thus roused him from his revery.

To what wild spot had the animal brought him? David lifted his head and looked about him, and it was as if he had been caught up and dropped in an enchanted wood. The horse had climbed among great boulders and paused beneath an enormous overhanging rock. He heard, off at one side, the rushing sound of a mountain stream and judged he was near the head of Lone Pine Creek. But oh, the wildness of the spot and the beauty of it and the lonely charm! He tied his horse to a lithe limb that swung above his head and, dismounting, clambered on towards the rushing water.

The place was so screened in as to leave no vista anywhere, hiding the mountains on all sides. Light green foliage overhead, where branches thickly interlaced from great trees growing out of the bank high above, made a cool, lucent shadowiness all around him. There was a delicious odor of sweet-shrub in the air, and the fruity fragrance of the dark, wild wake-robin underfoot. The tremendous rocks were covered with the most exquisite forms of lichen in all their varied shades of richness and delicacy.

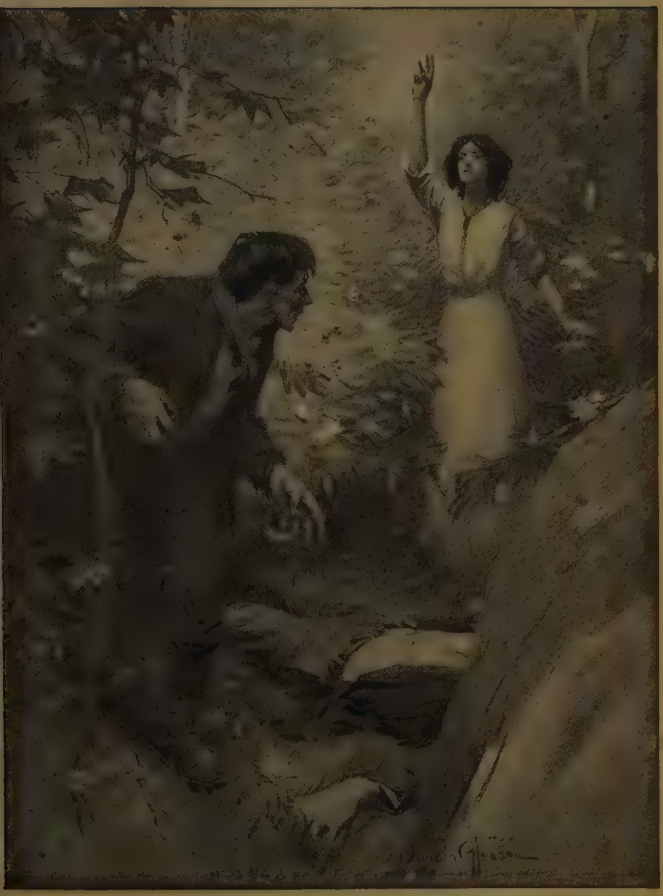
He began carefully removing portions here and there to examine under his microscope, when he noticed, almost crushed under his foot, a pale purple orchid like the one Cassandra had placed on his table. Always thinking of her, he stooped suddenly to lift the frail thing, and at the instant

a rifle-shot rang out in the still air, and a bullet meant for his heart cut across his shoulders like a trail of fire and flattened itself on the rock where he had been at work. At the same moment, with a bound of tiger-like ferocity and swiftness, one leaped toward him from a near mass of laurel, and he found himself grappling for life or death with the man who fired the shot.

Not a word was spoken. The quick, short breathing, the scuffling of feet among the leaves, and the snapping of dead twigs underfoot were the only sounds. Had the youth been a trained wrestler, David would have known what to expect, and would have been able to use method in his defence. As it was, he had to deal with an enraged creature who fought with the desperate instinct of an antagonist who fights to the death. He knew that the odds were against him, and felt rising within him a wild determination to win the combat, and, thinking only of Cassandra, to settle thus the vexed question, to fight with the blind passion and the primitive right of the strongest to win his mate. He gathered all his strength, his good English mettle and nerve, and grappled with a grip of steel.

This way and that, twisting, turning, stumbling on the uneven ground, with set teeth and faces drawn and fierce, they struggled, and all the time the light tweed coat on David's back showed a deeper stain from his heart's blood, and his face grew paler and his breath shorter. Yet a joy leaped within him. It was thus he might save her, either to win her or to die for her, for should Frale kill him, she would turn from him in hopeless horror, and David, even in dying, would save her.

Suddenly the battle was ended. Thryng's foot turned, on a rounded stone, causing him to lose his foothold. At the same instant, with terrible forward impetus, Frale closed with him, bending him backward until his head struck the lichen-covered rock. The purple orchid was bruised beneath him, and its color deepened with his blood. Then Frale rose and looked down upon the pallid, upturned face and inert body, which lay as he had crushed it down. As he stood thus, a white figure, bareheaded and alone, came swiftly through the wall of laurel which hid them and pausing terror-stricken in the open space, looked from one to the other.



"I take it back—back from God—the promise I gave you there by the fall." Page 171.

For an instant Cassandra waited thus, as if she too were struck dead where she stood. Then she looked no more on the fallen man, but only at Frale, with eyes immovable and yet withdrawn, as if she were searching in her own soul for a thing to do, while her heart stood still and her throat closed. Those great gray eyes, with the green sea depths in them, began to glow with a cruel light, as if she too could kill, — as if they were drawing slowly from the deep well of her being, as it were, a sword from its scabbard wherewith to cut him through the heart. Her hand stole to her throat and pressed hard. Then she lifted it high above her head and held it, as if in an instant more one might see the invisible sword flash forth and strike him. Frale cried out then, "Don't, don't curse me, Cass," and lifted his arm to shield his face, while great beads of moisture stood out on his face.

"It's not for me to curse, Frale." Her voice was low and clear. "Curses come from hell, like what you been carrying in your heart that made you do this." Her voice grew louder, and her hand trembled and shut as if it grasped something. "I take it back — back from God — the promise I gave you there by the fall." Then, looking up, her voice grew low again, though still distinct. "I take that promise back forever, oh, God!" Her hand dropped. The cruel light died slowly out of her eyes, and she turned and knelt by the prostrate man, and began pulling open his coat. Frale took one step toward her.

"Cass," he said, with shaking voice, "I'll he'p you."

Her hands clinched into David's coat as she held it. "Go back. Don't you touch even his least finger," she cried, looking up at him from where she knelt like a creature hurt to the heart, defending its own. "You've done your work. Take your face where I never can see it again."

He still stood and looked down on her. She turned again to David, and, thrusting her hand into his bosom, drew it forth with blood upon it.

"I say, you Frale!" she cried, holding it toward him, quivering with the ferocity she could no longer restrain, "leave here, or with this blood on my hand I'll call all hell to curse you."

Frale turned with bowed head and left her there.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH DAVID THRYNG AWAKES

THRYNG lay in Hoke Belew's cabin, — not in the one great living-room where were the fireplace and the large bed and the tiny cradle, but in the smaller addition at the side, entered only from the porch which extended along the front of both parts.

He still lay on the litter upon which he had been placed to carry him down the mountain, — an improvised thing made by stretching quilts across two poles of slender green pines. The litter was placed on low trestles to raise it from the floor, and close to the open door to give him air. David had not regained consciousness since his hurt, but lay like one dead, with closed eyes and blanched lips; yet they knew him to be living.

Cassandra sat beside him alone. All night long she had been there unsleeping, hollow-eyed, and worn with tearless grief. She had done all she knew how to do. Before going for help she had removed his clothing and bound about his body strips torn from her dress to stop the bleeding of his shoulders where the silver bullet had torn across them. How the ball had missed giving a mortal wound was like a miracle.

Hoke Belew had tried to arouse him, but had failed. At intervals, during the night, Cassandra had managed to drop a little whiskey between his lips with a spoon, and she had bathed him with the stimulant over heart and lungs, and chafed his hands, and had tried to warm his feet by rubbing them and wrapping them up between jugs of hot water. She had bathed his bruised head and cut away the softly curling hair from the spot where his head had struck the rock. What more she could do she knew not, and now she sat at his side still chafing his hands and waiting for Hoke Belew's return.

Hoke had gone to the station to telegraph for Bishop

Towers. Fortunately, as the hotel was so soon to be opened and the busy summer life to begin, the operator was already there.

Azalea, in the great room, was preparing dinner, stopping now and then to touch her baby's cradle, or to stoop a moment over the treasure therein. Aunt Sally sat in the doorway smoking her cob pipe and telling grewsome tales of how she had "seen people hurted that-a-way and nevah come out en hit." Sally had ridden over to give help and sympathy, but Cassandra had said she would watch alone. She had eaten nothing since the day before, only sipping the coffee Azalea had brought her.

It was one of those breathless hours before a rain when not a leaf stirs; even the birds were silent. Cassandra tried once more to give David a few drops of the whiskey, and this time it seemed as if he swallowed a little. She thought she saw his eyelids quiver, and her heart pounded suffocatingly in her breast. She dropped beside him on her knees and once again tried to give him the only stimulant they had. This time she was sure he took it, and, still kneeling there, she bowed her head and pressed her lips upon the hand she had been chafing. Did it move or not? She could not tell, and again she sat gazing in the still, white face. Oh, the suspense! Oh, the joy that was agony! If this were truly the awakening and meant life! In her intensity of longing for some further signs she drew slowly nearer and nearer, until at last her lips touched his. Then in shame she hid her face in the quilt at his side and, weak with the exhaustion of her long anguish and fasting and watching, she wept the first tears — tears of hope she was not strong enough to bear. As she thus knelt, weeping softly, his fluttering eyelids lifted and he saw her there, and felt the quivering hand beneath his head.

Not understanding how or why this should be, he waited perfectly still, trying to gather his thoughts. A great peace was in his heart — a peace and content so sweet he did not wish to move. Lingering beneath this content, he held a dim memory of a great anger — a horror of anger, when he saw red, and hungered for blood. Vaguely it seemed to him now that all was as he wished it to be with Cassandra near. He liked to feel her hand beneath his

head and her other hand upon his own, and her heavy bronze hair so close, and he closed his eyes once more to shut out all else, for the room was strange to him — this raftered place all whitewashed from ceiling to floor.

He had forgotten what had happened, but Cassandra was there, and he was content. Something had touched his lips and brought him back, he was sure of that, and his weakly beating heart stirred to more vigorous action. He turned his head a little, a very little, toward her, and his fingers closed about her hand to hold it there. She lifted her head then, and they looked into each other's eyes, a long, deep look. Later, when Azalea entered, she found them both sleeping, Cassandra's hand still beneath his head, his face pressed to her soft hair and his free arm flung about her.

Azalea stole away and hurried with the news to old Sally, who also crept in and looked on them and stole away.

"Yas, she sure have saved his life," said Sally. "Heap o' times they nevah do come out en that thar kin' o' sleep. I done seed sech before."

"Ef he have come to hisself, you reckon I bettah wake 'em up and give her a leetle hot milk? She hain't eat nothin' sence yestiday."

"Naw, leave 'em be. No body nevah hain't starved in his sleep yit, I reckon."

"He hain't eat nothin', neithah. He sure have been bad hurted."

The two women sat in the large room and talked in low tones, while at intervals Azalea crept to the door and looked in on them.

At last the baby wailed out with lusty cry, which sounded through the stillness of the house and roused Cassandra, but as she lifted her head, David clung to her and drew her cheek to his lips.

"Are you hurt?" he murmured. In some strange way he had confused matters, and thought it was she who had been shot.

"It's not me that's hurt," she said tenderly.

Azalea hurried away and returned with the warm milk she had prepared for Cassandra, who took it and held it to David's lips.

"Drink it, Doctah. She won't touch anything till you do."

Then he obeyed, slowly drinking it all, his eyes fixed on Cassandra's as a child looks up to his mother. As she rose, he held her with his free hand.

"What is it? How long —" His voice sounded thin and weak. "Strange — I can't lift this arm at all. Tell me —"

"Seems like I can't. When you are strong again, I will."

Feebly he tried to raise himself. "Don't, oh, don't, Doctah Thryng. If you bleed again, you'll die," she wailed.

"Sit near me."

She drew a low chair and sat near him, as she had through the slow and anxious hours, and again he drowsed off, only to open his eyes from time to time as if to assure himself that she was still there. Again Azalea brought her milk and white beaten biscuit, hot and sweet, and Cassandra ate. When David opened his eyes to look at her, she smiled on him, but would not let him talk to her.

Nevertheless his mind was busy trying to understand why he was lying thus, and dimly the events of the last few days came back to him, shadowy and confused. When he looked up and saw her smile, his heart was satisfied, but when he closed his eyes again, a strange sense of tragedy settled down upon him, but what or why he knew not. Suddenly he called to her as if from his sleep, "Have I killed some one?" and there was horror in his voice.

"No, no, Doctor Thryng. You been nigh about killed yourself. Oh, why didn't I send for a doctor who could do you right! Bishop Towers won't know anything about this."

"What have you done?"

"I sent for Bishop Towers."

"Who did me up like this?"

She was silent and, rising quickly, stepped out on the porch, her cheeks flaming crimson. Yesterday in her terror and frenzy she could have done anything; but now — with his eyes fixed on her face so intently — she could not reply nor tell how, alone, she had stripped him to the waist and bound him about with the homespun cotton of her dress to stanch the bleeding before hurrying down the mountain for help.

Instinctively she had done the right thing and had done

it well, but now she could not talk about it. David tried to call after her, but she had gone around into the next room and taken the baby from his cradle, where he was wailing his demands for attention. Azalea had gone out for a moment, and Aunt Sally "'lowed the' wa'n't no use sp'ilin him by takin' him up every time he fretted fer hit. Hit would do him good to holler an' stretch." So she sat still and smoked.

Cassandra walked up and down the porch, comforted by the feeling of the child in her arms. The small head bobbed this way and that until she pressed it against her cheek and held him close, and he gradually settled down on her bosom, his face tucked softly in the curve of her neck, and slept. She heard David speaking her name and went to him, but he only looked up at her and smiled.

"I'm sorry I left you alone," she said tenderly; "I'll call Aunt Sally."

"No — wait — I only want — to look at you."

She stood swaying her lithe body to rock the sleeping child. David thought he never had seen anything lovelier. How serious his wounds were, he did not know. But one thing he knew well, and to that one thought he clung. He wanted Cassandra where he could see her all the time. He wished she would talk to him, and not let him lose consciousness, relapsing into the horror of a strange dream that continued to haunt him.

"Do you love that baby?" he asked, his voice faint and high.

"He's a right nice baby."

"I say — do you love him?"

"Why — I reckon I do. Don't try to move that way, Doctah. You may not be done right, and you'll bleed again. Oh, we don't know — we are so ignorant — Azalie and me —"

He smiled. "Nothing matters now," he said.

They heard voices, and she looked out from the doorway. "It's Hoke. They've sent old Doctor Bartlett. I'm so glad. Aunt Sally, I reckon they'll need hot water. Get some ready, will you?"

"Cassandra, Cassandra!" called David, almost irritably.

She came back to him.

"Where are they?"

"Down the road a piece. I'm glad. You'll be done right now."

"Stoop to me." She obeyed, and the free arm caught and held her, then, as the voices drew near, released her with glowing eyes and burning cheeks.

She stepped out on the porch to meet them, half hiding her face behind the babe in her arms, and old Dr. Bartlett, as he looked on her with less prejudiced and more experienced eyes, thought he too never had seen anything lovelier.

"He's awake," said Cassandra quietly to Hoke, and the two men went to David. She carried the child back and asked Aunt Sally to wait on them, while she sat down in a low splint rocker, clinging to the little one and listening, with throbbing nerves, to the voices in the room beyond.

When Hoke came out to them a moment later, Azalea began eagerly to question him, but Cassandra was silent.

"Doctah says we bettah tote 'im ovah to his own place to-day. Aunt Sally 'lows she can bide thar fer a while an' see him well again."

"You hain't goin' to 'low that, be ye, Hoke? Hit mount look like we wa'n't willin' fer him to bide 'long of us."

"Hit hain't what looks like, hit's what's best fer him," said Hoke, sagely. "Whatevah doctah says, we'll do." Then Hoke laughed quietly. "He done tol' Doctor Bartlett 'at he reckoned somebody mus' 'a' took him fer some sorter wild creetur an' shot him by mistake. I guess Frale's safe enough f'om him, if the fool boy only know'd hit."

"Frale, he's plumb crazy, the way he's b'en actin'," said Azalea.

"An' Bishop Towahs he telegrafted 'at he'd send this here doctah, an' he'd come up to-morrer with Miz Towahs to stop ovah with you, so I reckon yer maw wants you down thar, Cass."

Cassandra rose quickly and placed the sleeping child gently in his cradle box. "I'll go," she said. "There's no need for me here now. Hoke — you've been right good —" She stopped abruptly and turned to his wife. "I must wear your dress off, Azalie, but I'll send it back by Hoke as soon as hit's been washed." She went out the door almost as if she were eager to escape.

"Hain't ye goin' to wait fer yer horse?" said Hoke, laughing. "Set a minute till I fetch him."

"I clean forgot," she said, and when he had left, she turned to her friend. "Azalie — don't say anything to Hoke about me — us. Did Aunt Sally see? You know I didn't know myself until I woke and found myself there. I'd been trying to make him take a little whiskey — and — I must have gone asleep like I was — and he woke up and must 'a' felt like he had to kiss somebody — he was that glad to be alive."

"Nevah you fret, child." Azalea smiled a quiet smile. "I'm not one to talk; anyway, I reckon Doctah Thryng's about right. He sure have been good to me."

The widow sat on her little stoop, waiting and watching, as her daughter rode to the door and wearily alighted.

"Cassandry Merlin! For the Lord's sake! What-all is up now? Hoyle — where is that boy? — Hoyle, come here an' take the horse fer sister. Be ye most dade, honey? I reckon ye be. Ye look like hit."

Cassandra kissed her mother and passed on into the house. "I couldn't send you word last night; anyway, I reckoned you'd rest better if you didn't know, for we-all thought Doctor Thryng was sure killed. Did Hoke tell you this morning?"

"I 'lowed you was stoppin' with Azalie — 'at baby was sick or somethin' — when Hoyle went up to the cabin an' said doctah wa'n't there. Frale sure have done for hisself. I reckon you are cl'ar shet o' him now, an' I'm glad ye be, since he done took to the idee o' marryin' with you. What-all have he done the doctah this-a-way fer? The' wa'n't nothin' 'twixt him an' doctah. Pore fool boy he! I'll be glad fer yuer sake, Cass, if he'll quit these here mountains."

"Oh, mother, mother! Don't talk about me, don't think of me! The doctor's nigh about killed — let alone the sin Frale has on him now." Wearied beyond further endurance, she flung herself on her bed and broke into uncontrollable sobbing, while Hoyle stood in the middle of the room and gazed with wide-eyed wonder.

"Be the doctah dade, maw?" he asked, in an awed whisper.

"No, child, no. You fetch a leetle light ud an' chips, an' we'll make her some coffee. Sister's that tired, pore child! Have ye been up all night, Cass?"

She nodded her head and still sobbed on.

"He's gettin' on all right now, be he?"

Again she nodded, but did not take her hands from her face.

"Then you'd ought to be glad. Hit ain't like Frale had of killed him. Farwell, he had many a time sech as that with one an' another, an' he nevah come to no harm f'om hit. I reckon Frale'll be safe. Be ye cryin' fer him, Cass? Pore child! I nevah did think you keered fer Frale that-a-way."

Then Cassandra burst forth with impetuous fire. "Oh, mother, mother! Never say that name to me again. Mother, I saw them! I saw them fighting — and all the time the doctor was bleeding — bleeding and dying, where Frale had shot him. I don't know how long they'd been fighting, but I came there and I saw them. I saw him slip and how Frale crushed him down — down — and his head struck the rock. I saw — and I almost cursed Frale. I hope I didn't — oh, I hope not! But mother, mother! Don't ask me anything more now. Oh, I want to cry! I want to cry and never stop."

While she lay thus weeping, the soft rain that had been threatening all day began pattering down, blessed and soothing, the rain to the earth and the tears to the girl.

In spite of the rain, Thryng was carried home that afternoon according to the physician's orders, and placed in his cabin with Aunt Sally to stand guard over him and provide for his wants. A bed was improvised for her on the floor of the cabin, while David lay in his own bed in his canvas room, bandaged about both body and head, and withal moderately comfortable, sufficiently himself to realize what had occurred, and overjoyed because of the reward his wounds had brought him.

Doctor Bartlett came down to the Fall Place and was given the bed in the loom shed as David had been, and had the pleasure of again seeing Cassandra, who, her tears dried, and her manner composed, looked after his needs as if no storms had ever shaken her soul.

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH DAVID SENDS HOKE BELEW ON A COMMISSION, AND CASSANDRA MAKES A CONFESSION

EARLY one morning Hoke Belew put his head in at the door of Thryng's cabin, where Aunt Sally was squatted before the fireplace, preparing breakfast for the patient.

"How's doc?" he asked.

"He's right fa'r. He mount be worse an' he mount be bettah."

"You reckon I mount go in yandah whar he is at?"

"Ye can look an' see is he awake. I'm gittin' his hot bread an' coffee. You bettah bide an' have a leetle," she said, with ever ready hospitality.

He crossed the floor with careful steps and paused in the doorway of the canvas room, big and smiling.

"That you, Hoke? Come in," said David, cheerfully. He extended a hand which Hoke took in his and held awkwardly, shocked at the white face before him.

"Ye do look puny," he said at last. "But we-uns sure be glad yer livin'. Ye tol' me to come early, so I come."

"It's awfully good of you. Bring a chair and sit near, so we can talk a bit. Now, Hoke, laid up here as I am, I need your help. I want to send you to Farington or Lone Pine — somewhere — I don't know where such things are to be had — but, Hoke, you've been married and know all about what's needed here."

"Ye want me to git ye a license, I reckon," said Hoke, grinning, "an' ye mount send me a errant I'd like a heap worse — that's so; but what good will hit be to ye now? You can't stan' on your feet."

"I can put it under my pillow and keep it to get well on. See here, Hoke. I don't even know if she'll marry me; she has not said so, but I'll be ready. You'll keep this quiet for me, Hoke? Because it would trouble her if the whole mountain side should know what I have done before she does. Yet a girl like Cassandra is worth winning if

you have to go to the edge of the grave to do it, so whenever she will have me, I want to be ready."

They talked in low tones, Hoke leaning forward close to David, his elbows on his knees. "I reckon you are a-thinkin' to bide on here 'long o' we-uns an' not carry her off nowhar else?" he asked gravely.

David's paleness left him for a moment, as the warm tide swept upward from his heart. "My home is not in this country, and wherever a man goes, he expects to take his wife with him. Don't you people here in the mountains do the same?"

"I reckon so, but hit would nigh about kill Azalie if she war to lose Cass. They have been frien's evah sence they war littlin's."

"Hoke, if you were to find it necessary to go away anywhere, would you leave your wife behind to please Cassandra Merlin?" The man was silent, and David continued. "Before you were married if you had known there was another man, and a criminal at that, hanging around determined to get her, wouldn't you have married her out of hand as soon as you could get her consent? It's my opinion, knowing the sort of man you are, that you would."

"I sure would."

"Then you can understand why I wish to have a marriage license under my pillow."

"I reckon so — but — you — you-all hain't quite our kind — not bein' kin to none of us — You understand me, suh. We-uns are a proud people here, an' we think a heap o' our women. Hit would be right hard should you git sorter tired o' Cassandry when you come to git her amongst your people — bein' she hain't like none o' your folks, understand; an' Cassandry, she's sorter hard hit jest now, she don't rightly know what-all she do think. Me an' Azalie, we been speakin' right smart together — an' — well, we do sure think a heap o' you, Doc — an' hit ain't no disrespect to you-uns, neither. Have you said anything to her maw?"

"Not a word. When I learned another man was before me, I stood one side as an honorable man should and gave him his chance. But when it comes to being attacked by the other man and shot in the back — by heaven! no

power on earth will hold me from trying to win her. As for the other matter, never you fear. Be my friend, Hoke."

"Waal, I reckon you'll have yer own way, an' I mount as well git hit fer ye, but I did promise Azalie 'at I'd speak that word to ye," said the young man, rising with an air of relief.

"Tell your wife that you are both of you quite right, and that I am right also. Just hunt up my trousers, will you? I want my pocket-book. If I have to sign anything before anybody — bring him here. I don't care what you do, so you get it. There, on that card you have it all — my full name and all that, you know."

David tried to eat what Sally prepared for him, using his unbound hand; but his egg was hard, his coffee thick and boiled. He could not drink it very well for his head was too low, and he could not raise himself, so he lay silent and uncomfortable, watching her move about his rooms, wearing her great black sunbonnet. She appeared kindly and pleasant when he could see her face, which was thin and very much lined, but motherly and good. He fell in the way of calling her "Aunt Sally" as others did, and this seemed to please her. She treated him as if he were a big boy who did not know what was good for himself. She called all the green blossoming things with which Cassandra had adorned the cabin, "trash," and asked who had "toted hit thar."

Waiting and listening, sure Cassandra would not leave him all day without coming to him, even though Aunt Sally had taken him in charge, David's mind was full of her. If he closed his eyes, he saw her. If he opened them and watched Sally's meagre form and black sunbonnet moving about, he thought what it might be to see Cassandra there.

He could not and would not look at the future. The picture Hoke Belew had summoned up when he had suggested the taking of Cassandra away among people alien to her, he put from him. He would not see it nor think of it. The present was his, and it was all he had, perhaps all he ever would have; and now he would not allow one little joy of it to escape him. He would be greedy of it and have all the gladness of the moments as they came.

He could see her down below making ready for their visitors, and he knew she would not come until the last task was done, but meantime his patience was wearing away. Aunt Sally finished her work, and David could see her from where he lay, seated in the doorway with her pipe, looking out on the gently falling rain.

Without, all was very peaceful; only within himself was turmoil and impatience. But he knew that to remain calm and unmoved was to keep back his fever and hasten recuperation, so he closed his eyes and tried to live for the moment in the remembrance of that awakening when he had found her kneeling at his side. Thus he dropped to sleep, and again, when he awoke, he found Cassandra there as if in answer to his silent call.

She was seated quietly sewing, as if it were no unusual thing for her to visit him thus, and when his earnest gaze caused her to look up, she only smiled without perturbation and came to him.

"I sent Aunt Sally down to see mother while I could stay by you and do for you a little," she said.

Calm and restful she seemed, yet when he extended his free hand and took hers, he felt a tremor in her touch that delighted his heart. He brought it to his lips.

"I've been needing you all the morning. Aunt Sally has done everything — all she could. If I should let you have this hand again, would you go so far away from me that I could not reach you?"

"Not if you want me near."

"Then put away your sewing and bring your chair close to me, and let us talk together while we may."

She obeyed and sat looking away from him out through the open door. Were her eyes searching for the mountain top?

"You have thoughts — sweet, big thoughts, dear girl; put them in words for me now, while we are so blessedly alone."

"I can't say rightly what I think. Seems like if I had some other way — something besides words to tell my thoughts with, I could do it better; but words are all we have — and seems like when I want them most they won't come."

"That's the way with all of us. Don't you see you are

still beyond my reach? Come. If you can't tell your thoughts in words, give them by the touch of your hands as you did a moment ago."

She did as he bade her and, leaning forward, took his hand in both her own.

"That's right. I'll teach you how to tell your thoughts without words. Now, how came you to find us the other day?"

"I don't know myself. It was a strange way. First I rode down to Teasley's Mill to — to try to persuade them — Giles Teasley — to allow him to go free." She paused and put her hand to her throat, as her way was. "I think, Doctor Thryng, I'd better build up the fire and get you some hot milk. Doctor Bartlett said you must have it often — and — to keep you very quiet."

"Not until you tell me now — this moment — what I ask you. You went to the mill to try to help Frale out of his trouble. Cassandra, have you loved that boy?"

Her face assumed its old look of masklike impassivity. "I reckoned he might hold himself steady and do right — would they only leave him be — and give him the chance —"

"Cassandra, answer me. Was it for love of him that you gave him your promise?"

Her face grew white, and for a moment she bowed her head on his hand.

"Please, Doctor Thryng, let me tell you the strange part first, then you can answer that question in your own way." She lifted her head and looked steadily in his eyes. "You remember that day we went to Cate Irwin's? When we came to the place where we can see far — far over the mountains — I laughed — with something glad in my heart. It was the same this time when I got to that far open place. All at once it seemed like I was so free — free from the heavy burden — and all in a kind of light that was only the same gladness in my heart.

"I stopped there and waited and thought how you said that time, 'It's good just to be alive,' and I thought if you were there with me and should put your hand on my bridle as you did that night in the rain, and if you should lead me away off — even into the 'Valley of the shadow of death' into those deep shadows below us I would go and never say a word. All at once it seemed as if you were

doing that, and I forgot Frale and kept on and on; and wherever it seemed like you were leading me, I went.

"It seemed like I was dreaming, or feeling like a hand was on my heart — a hand I could not see, pulling me and making me feel, 'This way, this way, I must go this way.' I never had been where my horse took me before. I didn't think how I ever could get back again. I didn't seem to see anything around me — only to go on — on — on, and at last it seemed I couldn't go fast enough, until all at once I came to your horse tied there, and I heard strange trampling sounds a little farther on where my horse could not go — and I got off and ran.

"I fell down and got up and ran again; and it seemed as if my feet wouldn't leave the ground, but only held me back. It seemed like they hadn't any more power to run — and — then I came there and I saw." She paused, covering her face with her hand as if to shut out the sight, and slipped to her knees beside him. "Oh, I saw your faces — all terrible —" He put his arm about her and drew her close. "I saw you fall, and your face when it seemed like you were dying as you fought. I saw —" Her sobs shook her, and she could not go on.

"My beautiful priestess of good and holy things!" he said.

She leaned to him then and, placing her arms about him, ever mindful of his hurt, she lifted his head to her shoulder. The flood-gates of her reserve once lifted, the full tide of her intense nature swept over him and enveloped him. It was as light to his soul and healing to his body. How often it had seemed as if he saw her with that halo of light about her, and now it was as if he had been drawn within its charmed radius, as surely he had.

"And then, dear heart, what did you do?"

"I thought you were killed, and almost — almost I cursed him. I hope now I wasn't so wicked. But I — I — called back from God the promise I had given him."

"And then — tell me all the blessed truth — and then —"

"You were bleeding — bleeding — and I took off your clothes — and I saw where you were bleeding your life away, and I tied my dress around you. I tore it in pieces and wound it all around you as well as I could, and then I

put your coat back on you, and still you didn't waken. It seemed as if you had stopped breathing. And then I saw the bruise on your head, and I thought maybe you were only stunned. I brought water from the branch and put your head on the wet cloth and bound it all around, but still you looked like he had killed you, and then —" he stirred in her arms to feel their clasp.

"And then — then —"

"I went for help," she said, in so low a tone it seemed hardly spoken.

"First you did something you have not told me."

She waited in a sweet shame he recognized and gloried in, but he wanted the confession from her lips.

"And then?"

"You said you would teach me to say things without words," she said tremulously.

"Not now. Later. Put everything you did in words. And then —"

"I thought you were dying." She drew in a long, sighing breath.

"And you kissed me. I have a right to know, for I missed them all —"

"I did, I did," she cried vehemently. "A hundred times I kissed you. I had called my promise back from God — and I dared it. I wasn't ashamed. I would have done it if all the mountain side had been there to see — but afterwards — when that strange doctor from Farington came, and I knew he must uncover you and find my torn dress around you — somehow, then I felt I didn't want for him to look at me, and I was glad to go away."

"Do you want to know what he said when he saw it? 'Whoever did this kept you alive, young man.' So you see how you are my beautiful bringer of good. You are — Oh, I have only one arm now. I am at a disadvantage. When I can stand on my feet, I will pay them all back — those kisses you threw away on me then. We shan't need words then, dearest. I'll teach you the sweet lesson. Your arms tremble; they are tired, dear. Could you let your head rest here and sleep as you did the other day? To think how I woke and found you beside me sleeping —"

"Let me go now. I have things I ought to do for you."

"Not yet. I have things I must say to you."

"Please, Doctor Thryng."

"My name is David. You must call me by it."

"Please, Doctor David, let me go."

"Why?"

"To warm some milk. I brought it up for you."

"Pity we must eat to live. Then if I let you take your arms away, will you come back to me?"

"Yes. I'll bring the milk."

"There, go. I'm giving you your own way because I know I will recover the sooner the strength I have lost. A man flat on his back, with but one arm free, is no good."

"But you don't let me go."

"Listen, Cassandra. You brought me back to life. Do you know what for? What did your father tell you? That one should be sent for you? It is I, dearest. From away over on the other side of the earth, I have come for you. We fought like beasts — Frale and I. I had given you up — you — Cassandra; had said in my heart, 'I will go away and leave her to the one she has chosen, if that be right,' and even at that moment, Frale shot me and sprang upon me, and I fought. I was glad the chance was given me there in the wilderness in that old and primitive way, to settle it and win you.

"I put all the force and strength of my body into it, and more; all the strength of my love for you. It was with that in my heart, we clinched. I said I will fight to the death for her. She shall be mine whether I live or die. Stop crying, sweet; be glad as I am. Give thanks that it was to the life and not to the death. Listen, once more, while I can feel and know; give way to your great heart of love and treat me as you did after you had bound up my wounds. Learn the sweet lesson I said I would teach you."

Late that evening, Hoke Belew rode up to the door of David's cabin and called Aunt Sally out to speak with him.

"How's doc?"

"He's doin' right well. He's asleep now. Won't ye 'light an' come in?"

"I reckon not. Azalie, she's been alone all day, an' I guess she'll be some 'feared. Will you put that thar under doc's pillow whar he kin find hit in the mawnin'? Hit's

a papah he sont me fer. Tell 'im I reckon hit's all straight. He kin see. Them people Cassandry was expectin' from Farington, did they come to-day?"

"Yas, they come. They're down to Miz Farwell's."

"Well, you tell doc 'at Azalie an' me, we'll be here 'long 'leven in the mawnin'." Hoke rode off under the winking stars, for the clouds after the long day of rain had lifted, and in the still night were rolling away over the mountain tops.

Aunt Sally slipped quietly back into the cabin and softly closed the door of the canvas room, lest the rustling of paper should waken her charge, for she meant to examine that paper, quite innocently, since she could neither read nor write, but out of sheer childish curiosity.

She need not have feared waking David, however, for, all his physical discomfort forgotten, dominated by the supreme happiness that possessed him, yet weak in body to the point of exhaustion, he slept profoundly and calmly on, even when she came stealthily and slipped the paper beneath his pillow, as Hoke had requested.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH THE BISHOP AND HIS WIFE PASS AN EVENTFUL DAY AT THE FALL PLACE

"Do you know, James," said Betty Towers, as she walked at her husband's side in the sweet morning, slowly climbing up to David's cabin from the Fall Place, "I feel almost vexed with you for never bringing me here before."

"Why — my dear!"

"Yes, I do. To think of all this loveliness, and for six years you have been here many times, and never once told me you knew a place hardly two hours away as entrancing as heaven. Even now, James, if it hadn't been for Cassandra, I wouldn't have come. Why — it's the loveliest spot on earth. Stand still a minute, James, and listen. That's a thrush. Oh, something smells so sweet! It's a locust! And that's a redbird's note. There he is, like a red blossom in those bushes. There — no, there. You will look in the wrong direction, James, and now he's gone. You remember what David Thryng wrote? 'It's good just to be alive.' He's always saying that, and now I understand — in such a place as this. Oh, just breathe the air, James!"

"I certainly can't help doing that, dear." The bishop was puffing a little over the climb his slight young wife took so easily.

"I don't care. Here I've lived in cities all my life, while you have lived down here, and it has lost its charm to you. Only think of all this gorgeous display of nature just for these mountain people, and what is it to them?"

"To them it's the natural order of things, just as you implied in regard to me."

"Hark, James. Now, that's a catbird!"

"And not a thrush?"

"The other was a thrush. I know the difference."

"Wise little woman! Come. There's that young man

getting up a fever by fretting. We said — I said we would come early."

"James, I'm going to stay up here and let you go to that stupid wedding down in Farington without me."

"Perhaps we may have something interesting up here, if you'll hurry a little."

"What is it, James?"

"I really can't say, dear." She took his hand, and they walked on.

"Wouldn't this be an ideal spot to spend a honeymoon? Hear that fall away down below us. How cool it sounds! Why don't you pay attention to me? What are you thinking about, James?"

"I am making a little poem for you, dear. Listen: —

"Chatter, chatter, little tongue,
What a wonder how you're hung!
Up above the epiglottis,
Tied on with a little knot 'tis."

"Only geniuses may be silly, James, but perhaps you can't help it. I think married people ought to establish the custom of sabbatical honeymoons to counteract the divorce habit. Suppose we set the example, now we have arrived at just the right time for one, and spend ours here."

"Anything you say, dear."

Being an absent-minded man, the bishop had fallen in the way of saying that, when, had he paused to think, he would have admitted that everything was made to bend to his will or wish by the spirited little being at his side. Moreover, being an absent-minded man, he drew her to him and kissed her. Aunt Sally, watching them from the cabin door, wondered if the bishop were going away on a journey, to leave his wife behind, for why else should he kiss her thus?

"Will you sit there on the rock and enjoy the mountains while I see how he is?" said the bishop.

So they parted at the door, and Aunt Sally brought her a chair and stood beside her, giving her every detail of the affair as far as she knew it. She sat bareheaded in the sun, to Sally's amazement, for she had her hat in her lap and could have worn it.

The wind blew wisps of her fine straight hair across her pink cheeks and in her eyes, as she gazed out upon the blue mountains and listened to Sally's tale of "How hit all come about." For Sally went back into the family history of the Teasleys, and the Caswells, and the Merlins, and the Farwells, until Betty forgot the flight of time and the bishop called her. Then she went in to see David.

He had worked his right hand free from its bandages and was able to lift it a little. She took it in hers, and looked brightly down at him.

"Why, Doctor Thryng, you look better than when you were in Farington! Doesn't he, James? Aunt Sally gave me to understand you were nearly dead."

David laughed happily. "I was, but I am very much alive now. I am to be married, Mrs. Towers; our wedding is to be quite *comme il faut*. It is to be at high noon, and the ceremony performed by a bishop."

"James!" Betty dropped into a chair and looked helplessly at her husband. "You haven't your vestments here!"

"I have all I need, dear. You know, Doctor, from Mr. Belew's telegram we were led to expect —"

"A death instead of a wedding?" David finished.

Betty turned to him. "Why didn't you tell us when you were down? You never gave the slightest hint of your state of mind, and there I was with my heart aching for Cassandra, when you — you stood ready to save her. I'm so glad for Cassandra; I could hug you, Doctor Thryng." Suddenly she turned on her husband. "James! Have you thought of everything — all the consequences? What will his mother — and the family over in England say?"

James threw up his hand and laughed.

"Don't laugh, James. Have you thought this all out, Doctor? Are you sure you can make them understand over there? Won't they think this awfully irregular? Will they ever be reconciled? I know how they are. My father was English."

"They never need be reconciled. It's our affair, and there's nothing to call me back there to live. What I do, or whom I make my wife, is nothing to them. I may visit my mother, of course, but for the rest, they gave me

up years ago, when I had no use for the life they mapped out for me. I have nothing to inherit there. It would go to my older brother, anyway. I may follow my own inclination — thank God! And as for it's being irregular — on the contrary — we are distinguished enough to have a bishop perform the ceremony. That will be considered a great thing at home — when they do come to hear of it."

"But it is very sudden, Doctor; I suppose that's why I said irregular." Betty Towers paused a moment with a little frown, then laughed outright. "Does Cassandra know she is to be married to-day?"

"She learned the fact yesterday — incidentally — bless her! and her only objection was a most feminine one. She had no proper dress. She said she was wearing her best when she found me and — but — I told her the trousseau was to come later."

Betty rose with impulsive importance. "Well, James, we've so little time, I must go and help her prepare. And you'll rest now, won't you, Doctor? You stay up here with him, James, and I'll find some way of sending your things up."

"Thar's Hoyle; he kin he'p a heap. He kin ride the mule an' tote anything ye like; and Marthy, I reckon ye kin git her up here on my horse — hit's thar at her place," said Sally, who had been standing in the doorway, keenly interested.

When they were alone she said to David: "Hit's a right quare way o' doin' things — gitt'n married in bed. but if Bishop Towahs do hit, hit sure must be all right — leastways Cassandry'll think so."

David took the superintendence of the arrangement of his cabin upon himself, and Hoke Belew, with the bishop's aid, carried out his directions. One side of his canvas room was rolled to the top, leaving the place open to the hills and the beauty without. His bed was placed so that he might face the open space, and that Cassandra could kneel at his right side. His writing-table, draped with a white cloth and covered with green hemlock boughs, formed the altar. It was all very quickly and simply done, and then David lay quiet, with closed eyes, listening to his musicians in the tree-tops, fluting their own glad-

ness, while Hoke Belew went down below, and the bishop sat out on the rock and meditated.

Cassandra came up to the cabin alone and sat with David, while the bishop donned his priestly vestments, and the wedding procession wound slowly up the trail from the Fall Place, decorously and gravely, clad in their best. Azalea and Betty came, side by side, the mother rode Sally's speckled white horse, and little Hoyle ran on ahead; Hoke carried his baby in his arms. Behind them all rode Uncle Jerry Carew, full of the liveliest interest and curiosity.

Said David: "This is May-day. I know what they're doing at home now, if the weather will let them. They're having gay times with out-of-door fêtes. The country girls are wearing their prettiest gowns, and the men are wearing sprigs of May in their buttonholes. Where did you get your roses?"

"Azalie brought them."

"And who put them in your hair?"

"Mrs. Towahs did that. Do you like me this way, David?"

"You are the loveliest being my eyes ever rested on."

"This was my best dress last year. I did it up and mended it this morning. It's home-woven like the one I — like the other one you said you liked."

David smiled, looking up into the gray eyes with the green lights and blue depths in them. How serene and poised her manner was, on the verge of the momentous step she was about to take, while his own heart was beating high. He wondered if she really comprehended the change it was to make in her life, that she showed no apprehension or fear.

"Cassandra, do you realize that in fifteen minutes you will be my wife? It will be a great change for you, dearest. In spite of all I can do, you may be sad sometimes, and I may ask of you things you don't want to do."

"I've been sad already in my life, and done things I didn't want to do. I don't guess you could change that — only God could."

"And you don't feel in the least disturbed? Your heart doesn't beat any harder nor your breath come quicker? Tell me how you feel."

She smiled and drew a long breath. "I don't know how it is. Everything is right peaceful and sweet outside — the sky and the hills and all the birds — even the wind is still in the trees, like everything was waiting for something good to happen."

"In your heart it is sweet and peaceful, too, and waiting for something good to happen?"

"Yes, David."

"God forgive me if ever I fail you," he said, drawing her down to him. "God make me worthy of you."

Then the bishop entered, and the little procession followed, and gathered about while the solemn words of the service were uttered. Cassandra knelt at David's side, as together they partook of the bread and wine, and with the worn circlet of gold which had been tied to her father's little Greek books, they were pronounced man and wife. Then, rising from her knees, she bent and kissed David, the long first kiss of the wedded pair, and turned her gravely happy face to the bishop, who admitted to Betty afterward that he had never kissed a bride, other than his own, with such unalloyed satisfaction.

It was all over quickly, and Cassandra was standing in a new world. Her eyes shone with the love-light no longer held back and veiled. She accompanied them all to the door and parted from them, even her mother and little Hoyle, as a hostess parting from her guests. She would not allow any one to stay behind, for the wedding feast had been spread in her mother's house, and thither they repaired to eat, and talk everything over.

"Mother felt right bad to leave us alone. She meant to bring everything up and all eat together here, but I thought it would be better, just we two, and me to set things out for you. Lie quiet and close your eyes, David, and make out like you are sleeping while I do it."

With perfect contentment he obeyed, and lay watching her through half-closed lids. It was always the same vision. She moved between him and a halo of light that seemed to be a part of her and to go with her, now at his bedside, now bending before the fireplace. At last the small pine table, which had served as an altar, was set with their first meal. The home was established.

He opened his eyes and looked on the feast she had set

before him. The pink rose was still in her hair, and one at her throat, and two perfect ones were in a glass near his plate. The table was drawn close to his bedside, and strawberries were upon it, and a glass pitcher of cream. There were white beaten biscuit, and tea — as he had made it for her so long ago on her first and only visit to his cabin when he was at home, so she had made it for him now. There were chicken and green peas, also.

"How quickly everything has happened! How perfect it all is! How did you get all these things together?"

So she told him where everything came from. "Mother churned the butter to have it right fresh, and she left it without salt for you, like you said you used to have it in England. Uncle Jerry brought the peas from his garden, and he shelled them himself. I made the biscuit this morning, and Aunt Sally fried the chicken when she came down, and Azalie prepared the peas, and we kept them all hot in the fireplace, theirs down there, and ours up here." Cassandra laughed merrily. "I reckon it looked funny. Every one carried something when they came up. Hoyle had the peas in a tin pail, and mother rode Aunt Sally's Speckle and carried the biscuit in a pan on front. Shut your eyes and you can see them come that way, David, while I sit here with you, talking and feeling that happy. Don't try to use your right hand that way; I can see it hurts you. Let me go on feeding you like I am. Don't I do it right?"

"Perfectly, but I want you to bring that cushion over here and put it under my pillow so you won't have to lift my head. That's right. Now I want to see you eat. You can't feed me and yourself at the same time. You won't? Then we'll take it turn about."

"How have you managed these days? Did Aunt Sally feed you? Oh, I don't believe you ate anything. You couldn't, could you?"

She spoke so sadly, he laughed. "It's a lucky thing you sent for the bishop instead of the doctor, or I would have had no wife and would have starved to death. I couldn't have survived another day."

Again she laughed out, as she seemed so suddenly to have learned to do. "And I would have stayed away and let

you starve to death? You must open your mouth, David, and not try to talk now."

"Ah, no, that's enough. We've a thousand things to say and plans to make. You eat while I talk. When I am up, we must find some one to stay with your mother. She should not be left alone." Cassandra paled a little. He was watching her face. "You will be staying up here with me, you know, all the time."

"Yes — I know." Her throat seemed to tighten, and she looked off toward the hills, as her way was.

"Don't you like the thought of staying up here with me? Make your confession, dearest one." He drew her down to look in his eyes. "It's done. We are man and wife."

Her eyes swam with tears, but her lips smiled. "I do. I do want to bide with you. All the way before me now looks like a long path of light — like what I have dreamed sometimes when the moon shines long down the mists at night. Only one place — I can't quite see — is it shadow or not. Perhaps it's only the thought of mother down there alone."

She spoke dreamily and with the same look of seeing things beyond, except that now she fixed her eyes, not on the mountain top, but on his own.

"Is it in my eyes you see the long path of light? Are we together in it? I see you always with the light about you. I saw you so first in your own home before the blazing fire — such a hearth fire as I had never seen before. You have appeared to me in my dreams with light about you ever since, and in my visions when I have been riding over these hills alone. What are you seeing now?"

"You, as you helped me that first time, there in the snow. You looked so ill, but your way was strong, and I thought — all at once, in a flash — like it came from —"

"Go on."

"Like it came from my father: 'One will come for you.'" She hid her face in his bosom, and her words came smothered and brokenly, "All the ride home I put them away, but they would come back, his words: 'On the mountain top, one will come for you'; but we were in such trouble — I thought it was just the thought of my father. It's always strongest when trouble comes, like he would comfort me."

"Don't you have it also when happiness comes to you, as on this morning while we waited together?"

"No great happiness like this ever came before. I have been glad, like when mother said I might go to Farington to school; and when I knelt and was confirmed, I was glad then. The first gladness I can remember was when my father used to carry me in his arms up and down his path and repeat strange poetry to me. When you are well, we will go there, won't we?"

"Yes, dearest; but didn't the remembrance come to you just now, when you saw the long path of light before us?"

"I think no, David. I'm afraid I forgot every one but you then, when you asked would I like to bide here with you; and the long path of light was our love — for it reaches up to heaven, doesn't it, David?"

"It reaches to heaven, Cassandra."

Then they were silent, for there was no more to say.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH THE SUMMER PASSES

MIDSUMMER arrived, and David, healed of his wounds, pronounced himself as "strong as a cricketer." What he meant by that Hoyle could only conjecture, and, after much pondering, decided that his strength was now so great that should he desire to do so, he could leap into the air or jump long distances after the manner of crickets.

"You reckon you could jump as fer in one jump now as from here to t'other side the water trough yandah?" he asked one day, as they sat on the porch steps together.

"No, I don't reckon so," said David, laughing.

"Well, could you jump ovah this here house and the loom shed in one jump?"

"I don't reckon so."

"Be sensible, honey son. You mustn't 'low him to ax ye fool questions, Doctah. You knows they hain't nobody kin do such as that, Hoyle," called his mother from within.

"He has some idea in his head. What is it, brother Hoyle?"

"I heered you tellin' Cass 'at you was gettin' strong as one o' these here cricket bugs, an' I had one t'other day; he could jump as fer as cl'ar acrost the po'ch — and he was only 'bout a inch long — er less 'n a inch. I thought if brothah David was that strong, he could jump a heap."

David had comforted Hoyle for the loss of Cassandra from the home by explaining that they were now become brothers for the rest of their lives, and in order to give this assurance appreciable significance, he had taken the small chap to the circus and had treated him to pink lemonade and a toy balloon.

They had remained over until the next day, and Doctor Bartlett and David had examined him all over at the old physician's office and then had gone into a little room by themselves and stayed a long time, leaving him outside.

Then, to compensate for such gross neglect, David had taken him to a clothing store and bought him a complete suit of store clothing, very neat and pretty. Hoyle would have been in the seventh heaven over all this, were it not, alas! that there the child for the first time in his life looked into a mirror that revealed him to himself from head to foot, little wry neck, hunched back and all.

David, not realizing this was a revelation to the little man, wondered, as they walked away, that all his enthusiasm and exuberance of spirits had left him, and that he walked at his side wearily and sadly silent. His pathetic little legs spindled down from the smart new trousers, and his hands dangled weakly from his thin wrists, albeit his fingers clung tightly to his toy balloon.

"We're going back to the bishop's now, and we'll have a good dinner, and then you'll have a whole hour to play with Dorothy before we leave for home," said David, cheeringly. The child made no response other than to slip his hand into David's. "What are you thinking about, brother Hoyle?"

"Jest nothin'. I war a-wonderin'."

"Oh, there is a difference? What were you wondering?"

"Maw told me if you war that good to take me to a circus, I mustn't bothah you with a heap o' questions 'at wa'n't no good."

"That's all right. I'm questioning you now."

"What war you an' that old man feelin' me all ovah for? War you tryin' to make out hu' come my hade is sot like this-a-way? Reckon you r'aly could set hit straight an' get this 'er lump off'n my back?"

"Don't worry about your head and your back. You have a very good head. That's more than some can say."

"I nevah see nary othah boy like I be. You reckon that li'l' girl, she thought I war quare?"

"What little girl?"

"Mrs. Towahs's li'l' girl. She said 'turn roun',' an' when I done hit, she said 'turn roun' agin.' Then she said, 'Whyn't you hol' your hade like I do?'"

"What did you say?"

"Didn't say nothin.' Jes' axed her whyn't she hol' her head like I did? an' she said, 'Don't want to.' So

I said, 'Don't want to.'" He twisted his head about to look up in David's face, and his lips smiled, but in his eyes was a suspicion of tears. His heart heavy for the child, David praised him for a brave little chap, comforting him as best he could.

"You reckon she'd like me if I war to give her this here balloon?"

"No, you take that home to sister. The little girl can get one when the circus comes again." But after dinner, David did not send Hoyle off to play the hour with Dorothy. He took her on his knee and entertained them both with tales and mimicry until he had them in gales of laughter, and for the time being Hoyle forgot his troubles.

As the days passed, David became more and more interested in his patch of ground and the growing things in his garden. Never had he labored with his hands in this fashion, and each night he lay down to sleep physically weary, in contentment of spirit. Steadily he progressed toward the desired goal of health. In his young wife, also, he found a rich satisfaction, watching her unfold and blossom into the gracious wifehood and ladyhood he had dreamed of for her.

Together they used to stroll to the little farm, where she told him all she knew about the crops—what was best for the animals, and what would be needed for themselves. Long before David was able to oversee the work himself, she had set Elwine Timms to sowing cow-peas and planting corn.

"Behold your heritage!" David said to her one morning, as they strolled thus among the thrifty greenness and patches of vetch where the cow was contentedly feeding. He laughed joyously and drew his wife's arm through his. She looked up at him wistfully. He thought she sighed, and bent his head to listen. "What was that little sound?"

"I was only thinking."

"We'll sit here where we sat that morning when we both put our hands to the plough, and you tell me what you were thinking."

"I ought not to stop now, David. I've left all for mother to do. I was that busy at the cabin I didn't get down to her this morning."

"You can't keep two homes going with only your own two dear hands, Cassandra. It must be stopped. We'll find some one to live with your mother and take your place." She gave a little gasp, then sat silently, her hands dropped passively in her lap, and he thought she seemed sad. He took her face between his hands and made her look into his eyes. "Don't be worried, sweetheart; we'll make a few changes. You're mine now, you know — not only to serve me and labor for me as you have been doing all these weeks, but —"

"But I like it, David. I like doing for you. I hope it may always be so I can do for you."

"Would you like me to become an invalid again so you could keep on in the way you began?"

"Not that — but sometimes I think what if you shouldn't really need me!" She hid her face on his breast. "I — I want you to need me — David!" It was almost like a cry for help, as she said it.

"Dear heart, dear heart! What are you thinking and fearing? Can't you understand? You are mine now, to be cared for and loved and held very near and dear to my heart. We are no more twain, we are one."

"Yes, but — but — David, I — I want you to need me," she sobbed, and he knew some thought was stirring in her heart which she could not yet put into words. He comforted her and soothed her, explaining certain plans which later he put into execution, so that her duties at the Fall Place were brought to an end and he could have her always with him.

A daughter of her Uncle Cotton, who had gone down into South Carolina to live, was induced to come and stay with the widow, and the girl's brother came with her and helped David on the farm.

Then David made changes in and about his cabin. He built on another room and put therein a cook stove. He could not bear to see his young wife bending at the hearth preparing their meals, and when she demurred, he explained that he wished to keep her as she was and not see her growing old and wrinkled before her time, with the burning heat of the open fire in her face, like many of the mountain women.

One evening, — they had eaten their supper out under

the trees, — she proposed they should walk up to her father's path, as she called the spot toward which she so often lifted her eyes, and David was well pleased to go with her. As they set out, she asked him to wait a moment while she went back for something, and quickly returned, bringing his flute.

"I've often wished father could have heard you play on this," she said, as he took it from her hand.

They crossed the little river that tumbled and rushed among great moss-covered boulders on its way to the fall, and followed its wayward course toward its head, where the way was untrodden and wild, as if no human foot had ever climbed along its banks. After a little they turned off toward a tremendous rock of solid granite that had been cleft smoothly in twain by some gigantic force of nature, and, walking between the towering walls of stone, came out on the farther side upon a small level space, where immense ferns and flags grew thickly in the rich soil, held in place and kept damp by the great cool masses of stone.

Above this little dell the hill rose steeply, and Cassandra led him to a narrow opening in the dense shrubbery surrounding the spot from which a beaten path wound upward, overarched with thickly interlacing branches of birch wood and hemlocks. Along this winding trail they climbed, until they reached a cluster of enormous cedars which made the dark place on the mountain Cassandra had pointed out to him from below. Here the path widened so they could walk side by side, and continued along a level line at the foot of the dark mass of trees.

"Here father used to walk up and down reading in his little books; seems like I can hear his voice now. Sometimes he would look off over the valley below us there and repeat parts by heart. Isn't it beautiful here, David?"

"Heavenly beautiful!"

"I'm glad we never came here before."

"Why, dearest?"

"Because." She hesitated with parted lips, and cheeks flushed from the climb. David stood with bared head. He felt as if he were in a cathedral.

"And why because?" he asked again.

"For now we bring just happiness with us. We're not

troubled or wondering about anything. No sorrow comes with us. In our hearts we are sure — sure —" She paused again and lifted her eyes to his.

"Sure that all is right when we belong to each other — this way?"

"Yes, sure! Oh, David, sure — sure!" She threw her arms about his neck and drew his face down to hers. "It's even a greater happiness than when he used to carry me in his arms here. There's no sorrow near us. It's all far away."

Thus, sometimes she would throw off all the habitual reserve of her manner and open her heart to him, following the rich impulses of her nature to their glorious revelation.

"Now, David, sit here and play; play your flute as you did that first time when I learned who made the music that I thought must be the 'Voices,' that time I climbed up to see."

They sat under the great cedars on a bank of moss, and David took the flute from her hand, smiling as he thought of that moment when he had stood among the blossoming laurel and watched her as she moved about his cabin, the day before his hurt, and how she had kissed it.

"I used to sit here like this." She bent forward and rested her head on his knee. She had a way of putting her two hands together as a child is taught to hold them in prayer and placing them beneath her cheek; and so she waited while David paused, his hand on her hair, and his eyes fixed on the sea of hilltops where they melted into the sky, — a mysterious, undulating line of the faintest blue, seen through the arching branches above, and the swaying hemlocks on either side, and over the tops of a hundred varieties of pines and deciduous trees beneath them, all down the long slope up which they had climbed.

Thus they waited, until she lifted her head and looked into his eyes questioningly. He bent forward and kissed her lips and then lifted the flute to his own — but again paused.

"What are you thinking now, David?" she asked.

"So you really thought it was the 'Voices'? What was their message, Cassandra?"

"I couldn't make it out then, but I thought of this place and of father, and it was all at once like as if he would

make me know something, and I prayed God would he lead me to understand was it a message or not. So that was the way I kept on following — until I—"

"You came to me, dear?"

"Yes."

"And what did you think the interpretation was then?"

"Yes, it was you — you, David. It was love — and hope — and gladness — everything, everything —"

"Go on."

"Everything good and beautiful — but — sometimes it comes again —"

"What comes?"

"Play, David, play. I'll tell you another time in another place, not here. No, no."

So he played for her until the dusk deepened around and below them, and they had to make their way back stumblingly. When they came to the wild, untrodden bank of the little river, David resigned the choosing of their path entirely to her and followed close, holding her hand where she led. When at last they reached their cabin, they did not light candles, but sat long in the doorway conversing on the deep things of their souls.

It still seemed to David as if she held something back from him, and now he begged her for a more perfect self-revealing.

"It is no longer as if we were separate, dearest; can't you remember and feel that we are one?"

"In a way I do. It is very sweet."

"You say in a way. In what way?"

"Why, David?"

"I want your point of view."

"I see. We're not really one until we see from each other's hilltop, are we?"

"No, and you never take me into the secret places of your heart and let me look off from your own hilltop."

"Didn't I this very evening, David?"

"We stood on the same spot of earth and looked off on the same distance, yet in my soul I know I did not see what you saw."

"Pictures come to me very suddenly and just float by, hardly understood by myself. I didn't want you to see all I saw, David. I don't know how comes it, but all the

time, even in the midst of our great gladness — right when it is most beautiful — far before me, right across our way, is a place that is dim. It seems 'most like the shadows that fall on the hills when those great piles of clouds pass through the sky, when it is deep blue all around them and the sun shines everywhere else."

"Your soul is still an undiscovered country to me, Cassandra."

"I should think you'd like that. Don't men love to go discovering? And if you could get into the secret chambers, as you call them, you wouldn't find much. Then you'd be sorry."

"Cassandra, what are you covering and holding back?"

"I don't know, David. It's like it was when I couldn't understand the message of the 'Voices'! When it comes clear and strong, I'll tell you."

"Then there is something?"

"Yes."

With a little sigh, she rose and entered the cabin. He sat in silence as she had left him, but soon she returned. Standing behind him in the darkness, she put her interlaced fingers under his chin and drew his face backward until she could see it, white in the dusk, beneath her eyes.

"You have come back to explain?"

"If I can, David. It's hard for me to put in words what is so dim — what I see. It's all just love for you, David. The love burns and blazes up in me like the fire when it's fiercest on the hearth, when the day is cold outside. You've seen it so. In the little books my father used to read, there was a tale of a woman who had my name. She foretold the sorrows to come. Perhaps she saw as I see things in the dim pictures, only more clearly, and wisdom was given her to interpret them.

"Often and often I've felt that in me — that strange seeing and knowing before, and I don't like it. Only once it made me feel glad — when it led me to you and Frale that terrible moment. But it wasn't a picture that time; it was a feeling that pulled me and made me go. I would have gone that time if I had died for it."

He took her two hands and covered them with kisses, there in the darkness. "I told you you were my priestess of all that is good."

"But I don't want to be always seeing the shadows and foreboding. I want to be all happy — happy — the way you are."

"I believe you are one of the blessed ones of God who have 'the gift'; but you are right to feel as you do. Your life will be more normal and wholesome not to try to probe into the future. I'll not attempt to take my coarser humanity into your holy places, dear."

He led her into their canvas sleeping chamber, and there she was soon calmly slumbering at his side; but he lay long pondering and trying to see his way out of a certain dilemma of unrest that had been creeping into his veins and prodding him forward ever since his reëstablished health had become an assured fact. He recognized it as no more than the proper impulse of his manhood not to stagnate and slumber in a lotus dream, even as delicious a dream as this. Ah, it was inevitable. His world must become her world.

Herein lay the dilemma. This unsullied, beautiful being must enter that sordid old world, that had so pressed upon him and broken him down. This idyl might go on for perhaps a year longer — but not for always — not for always.

He slept at last, and dreamed that they were being driven along a dark, cold river, wide and swift; that they had entered it where it was only a narrow, rushing stream, sparkling and tumbling over rocks, and winding in intricate turnings on itself; that they had laughed as they followed it, plashing among the stones where she led him by the hand, until it grew wider and deeper and colder, and they were lifted from their feet and were tossed and swirled about, and she cried and clung to him, and even as he clasped her and held her, he knew her to be slipping from him. Then in terror he awoke, and, reaching out in the darkness, drew her into his embrace and slept again.

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH DAVID TAKES LITTLE HOYLE TO CANADA

"David," said his wife next day, as he came whistling up to his cabin from the farm below, "do you mind if I give mother a little help with the weaving? Mattie can't do it. She's right nigh spoiled the counterpane we had on when she came, and since mother's hurt, she can't work the treadles, so now the hotel's open Miss Mayhew may come and find them not half done."

"Do I mind? Why should I mind, if you don't 'right nigh' spoil your back and wear yourself out?"

"Then I'll go down with you after dinner and see can I patch up Mattie's mistakes. It takes so much patience — a loom does, to understand it."

Mattie was the cousin David had imported from the low country to relieve Cassandra from the burden of the work in the home below. Although a disappointment to them, she still did her work after her own fashion, clumsily and slowly, but her Aunt 'Marthy' was never at rest, prodding the dull nature forward, trying to make her take the interest Cassandra had done.

David had wisely persuaded his wife to leave them to themselves, to work out the problem of adjustment to the new conditions as best they might, and his persuasions had been of a more peremptory nature than he realized. To Cassandra they had been as commands, but now — when the weaving on which the widow had counted so much was likely to be ruined by Mattie's unskilled hands — the old mother had declared she could not bear to see her niece around and should "pack her off whar she come from."

Therefore Cassandra had made her timid request — the first evidence of shrinking from her husband she had ever given. Why was it? he asked himself. What had he ever said or done to make her prefer a request in that way?

But it was over in an instant, and her own poised manner returned as they ate and chatted together.

Little Hoyle came running up to eat with them. He had conceived a dislike to the home below since the incumbent had come to take his sister's place, and evaded thus, as often as possible, his mother's vigilance. David did not mind the intrusion, but suffered the adoring little chap to sit at his side, ever twisting his small body about to fix his great eyes on David's face, while he plied him with questions and hung on his words too intent to attend to his own eating unless admonished thereto by his sister.

"If you don't eat, son, I'll send you back to mother," she threatened.

"I won't go," he rebelled joyously. "I'll jes' set here 'longside brothah David."

"No, you won't, young man. You'll do whatever sister says. That's what I do." He put his hand on the boy's tousled head and turned him about to his plate, well filled with food still untouched, but he noticed that the child ate listlessly, more as an act of obedience than from a normal desire. He glanced up at his wife and saw that she also noticed Hoyle's languor. They finished the meal in a silence only broken by Hoyle's questions and David's replies, now serious, now teasing and bantering.

"You are so full of interrogation points you have no room for your dinner. Here — drink this milk — slowly; don't gulp it."

"I know what they be. They go this-a-way." The boy set down his glass to illustrate with his slender little hand the form of the question mark. Then he laughed out gayly. "You know hu' come I got filled up with them things? I done swallered that thar catechism Cass b'en teachin' me Sundays."

"No, I'm thinking you just are one yourself."

"'Cause I'm crooked like this-a-way?" He twisted about and looked up at David gravely.

"No, no, son. Doctor didn't mean that," said his sister.

"Finish your milk," said David. "We'll have some fun with the microscope." And once again the child essayed to eat and drink a little.

But the languor and pallor grew in spite of all David

could do for him, and as the weeks passed his large eyes burned more brilliantly and his thin form grew more meagre. Cassandra got in the way of keeping him up at the cabin with her, and when she went down to weave, he went also and used to lie on the bundles of cotton, poring over the books which David procured for him from time to time.

"What he gets in that way won't hurt him. It's not like having set tasks to learn, and he's not burdened with any 'ought' or 'ought not' about it. Let him vegetate until cooler weather. Then, if he doesn't improve, we'll see what can be done. Something radical, I imagine."

The fall arrived in a splendor that was truly oriental in its gorgeousness. The changing colors of the foliage surpassed in brilliancy anything David had ever seen or imagined possible. The mantle of deepest green which had clothed the mountain sides all summer, became transmuted, until all the world was glorified and glowing as if the heat of the summer sun had been stored up during the drowsy days to burst forth thus in warmest reds and golds.

"The hills look as if they had clothed themselves in Turkish rugs, ancient and fine," said David one evening, as he sat on his rock, watching them burn in the afterglow of the setting sun.

"How much there is for me to learn and know," Cassandra replied in a low voice. "I never saw a Turkish rug. You often speak of things I know nothing about."

David laughed and turned upon her happy eyes. "Why so sad for that? Did you think I loved you and married you for your worldly knowledge?" She smiled back at him and was silent. Presently he continued. "Now, while Hoyle is not here, I wish to talk to you a little about him."

"Yes, David." Her heart fluttered with a nameless fear, but she betrayed no sign of emotion.

"You've seen, of course. It's not necessary to tell you."

"No, David — only — does it mean death?" She put her hand out to him, and he took it in his and stroked it.

"Not surely. We'll make a fight for him, won't we, dear?"

"Oh, David! What can we do?" she moaned.

"There's a thing to do that I've been reserving as a last

resort. I think the time has come to try it. This curvature presses on some vital part, and the action of his heart is uncertain. He needs the tonic of the cold, — the ice and snow. Would you trust him to me, dear? I'll take him to Doctor Hoyle. You know very well everything kindness and skill can do will be done for him there."

"Yes, yes, David. You are so good to him always! Would — would you go — alone with him?" She drew closer to him, her head on his shoulder and her hand in his, but he could not see her face.

"You mean without you, dearest?"

"Yes."

"That may be as you say. Would you prefer to go with us?"

She drew a long breath, slowly, like an indrawn sigh, and something trembled to pass her heart, but suddenly the old habit of reserve sealed her lips and she remained silent.

"What do you say?" he urged.

"Tell me first — do you want me to go?"

He was silent, and they sat waiting for each other. Then he said, "I do want you to go — and yet I don't want you to go — yet. Sometime, of course, we must go where I may find wider scope for my activities." He felt her quiver of anxiety. "Not until you are quite ready yourself, dear, always remember that." Still she was silent, and he continued: "I can't say that I'm quite ready myself. I would prefer one more year here, but Hoyle must be removed without delay. We may have waited too long as it is. Will your mother consent? She must, if she cares to see him live."

"Oh, David! Go, go. Take him and go to-morrow. Leave me here and go — but — come back to me, David, soon — very soon. I — I shall need you, I — Can you leave Hoyle there and come back, David? Or must you bide there, too?" Suddenly she bowed her face in her hands. "Oh, I'm so wicked and selfish to think of leaving him there without you or me or mother — one. David, what can we do? He might die there, and you — you must come back for the winter; what would save him, might kill you. Oh, David! Take me with you, and leave me there with him, and you come back. Doctor Hoyle will take care of him — of us — once we are there."

"Now, now, now! hold your dear heart in peace. Why, I'm well. To stay another winter would only be to establish myself in a more rugged condition of body — not that I must do so. We'll talk with your mother to-morrow. It may be hard to persuade her."

But he found the mother most reasonable and practical. He even tried to abate her perfect trust in him and his ability to bring the child back to her quite well and strong.

"This isn't a trouble that is ever really cured, you know. When taken young enough, it may be helped, and I've known people who have lived long and useful lives in spite of it. That's all we may hope for."

"Waal, I 'low ye can't git him no younger'n he be now, an' he's that peart, I reckon he's worth hit — leastways to we-uns."

"Of course he's worth it."

"You are right good to keer fer him like you have. I'd do a heap fer you ef I could. All I have is jest this here farm, an' hit's fer you an' Cass. On'y ef ye'd 'low me an' leetle Hoyle to bide on here whilst we live —"

David was touched. "Do you realize I've found here the two greatest things in the world, love and health? All I want is for you to know and remember that if I can't succeed in doing all I would like for the boy, at least I tried my very best. I may not succeed, you know, but this is the only thing to do now — the only thing."

David parted from his young wife, leaving her standing in the door of their cabin, clad in her white homespun frock, smiling, yet tearful and pale. He was to walk down to the Fall Place, where Jerry Carew waited with the wagon in which he had arrived, and where his baggage had been brought the day before. When he came to the steepest part of the descent, he looked back and saw Cassandra still standing as if in a trance, gazing after him. He felt his heart lean towards her, and, turning sharply, walked swiftly to her and took her once more in his arms and looked down into those deep springs — her sweet gray eyes. Thus for a long moment he held her to his heart with never a word. Then she entered the little home, and he walked away, looking back no more.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH DOCTOR HOYLE SPEAKS HIS MIND

Doctor Hoyle sat in his office staring straight before him, not as if he were looking at David Thryng, who sat in range of his vision, but as if seeing beyond him into some other time and place. David had been speaking, but now they both were silent, and the young man wondered if his old friend had really been paying attention to his words or not.

"Well, Doctor," he said at last.

"Well, David."

"You don't seem satisfied. Is it with my condition?"

"Your condition? No, no, no! It's not your condition. Yes, yes — fine, fine. I never saw such a marvellous change in my life, never!"

David smiled over the old doctor's stammer of enthusiasm. It was as if his thoughts, fertile and vehement, and the feelings of his great, warm heart welled up within him, and, trying to burst forth all at once, tumbled over themselves, unable to secure words rapidly enough in which to give themselves utterance.

"Then why so silent and dubious?"

"Why — why — y—young man, I wasn't thinking anything about you just then." And again David laughed, while his wiry old friend jumped up and walked rapidly and restlessly about the small apartment and laughed in sympathy. "It's not — not —"

"I know." David grew instantly sober again. "Of course the little chap's case is serious — very — or I would not have brought him to you."

"Oh, no, no, I'm not thinking of Adam, bless you, no." The doctor always called his little namesake Adam. "I'm thinking of her — the little girl you left behind you. Yes — yes. Of her."

"She's not so little now, Doctor; she's tall — tall enough to be beautiful."

"I remember her, — slight — slight little creature, all eyes and hair, all soul and mind. Now what are you going to do with her, eh?"

"What is she going to do with me, rather! I'll go back to her as soon as I dare leave the boy."

"But, man alive! what — what are — you can't live down there all your days. It's to be life and work for you, sir, and what are you going to do with her, I say?"

"I'll bring her here with me. She'll come."

"Of course you'll bring her here with you, and you — you'll have plenty of friends. Maybe they'll appreciate her, and maybe they won't; maybe they won't, I say; Understand? And she'll c—come. Oh, yes, she'll come! she'll do whatever you say, and presently she'll break her heart and die for you. She'll never say a word, but that's what she'll do."

"Why, Doctor!" cried David, appalled. "I love her as my own life — my very soul."

"Of — of course. That goes without saying. We all do, we men, but we — damn it all! Do you suppose I've lived all these years and not seen? Why — we think of ourselves first every time. D—don't we, though? Rather!"

"But selfish as we are, we can love — a man can, if he sets himself to it honestly, — love a woman and make her happy, even without the appreciation of others, in spite of environment, — everything. It's the destiny of women to love us, thank God. She would have been doomed surely to die if she had married the one who wanted her first — or to live a life for her worse than death."

"Oh, Lord bless you, boy, yes. It's a woman's destiny. I'm an old fool. There — there's my own little girl, she's m—married and gone — gone to live in England. They will do it — the women will. Come, we'll go see Adam."

The doctor sprang up, brushed his hand across his eyes, and caught up a battered silk hat. He turned it about and looked at it ruefully, with a quizzical smile playing about the corners of his eyes. "Remember that hat?" he asked.

"Well do I remember it. You've driven many a mile in many a rainstorm by my side under that hat! When you're done with it, leave it to me in your will. I have a fancy for it. Will you?"

"Here, take it — take it. I'm done with it. Mary scolds me every day about it. No p—peace in life because of it. Here's a new one I bought the other day — good one — good enough."

He lifted a box which had fallen from his cluttered office table, and took from it a new hat which had evidently not been unpacked before. He tried it on his head, turned it about and about, took it off and gazed at it within and without, then hastily tossed it aside and, snatching his old one from David put it on his head, and they started off.

Hoyle had been placed in a small ward where were only two other little beds, both occupied, with one nurse to attend on the three patients. One of them had broken his leg and had to lie in a cast, and the other was convalescing from fever, but both were well enough to be companionable with the lonely little Southerner. Hoyle's face beamed upon David as he bent over him.

"I kin make pi'chers whilst I'm a-lyin' here," he cried ecstatically. "That thar lady, she 'lows me to make 'em. She 'lows mine're good uns." David glanced at the young woman indicated. She was pleasant-faced and rosy, and looked practical and good.

"He's such an odd little chap," she said.

"What be that — odd? Does hit mean this 'er lump on my back?" He pulled David down and whispered the question in his ear.

"No, no. She only means that you're a dear, queer little chap."

"What be I quare fer?"

"What are all these drawings? Tell us what they mean."

"This'n, hit's the ocean, an' that thar, hit's a steamship sailin' on th' ocean, like you done tol' me about. An' this'n, hit's our house an' here's whar ol' Pete bides at; an' this'n's ol' Pete kickin' out like he hated somethin' like he does when we give Frale's colt his corn first." The other small boys from their beds laughed out merrily and

strained their necks to see. "These're theirn. I made this'n fer him an' this'n fer him."

He tossed the pictures feebly toward them, and they fluttered to the floor. David gathered them up and gave them to their respective owners. The old doctor stood beside the cot and looked down on the little artist. His lips twitched and his eyes twinkled.

"Which one is y—yours?" he asked.

"I keep this'n with the sea — an' — here, I made this'n fer you." He paused, and selected carefully among the pile of papers under his hand. "You reckon you kin tell what 'tis?"

The doctor took the paper and regarded it gravely a moment, then lifted his eyebrows and made grimaces of wonderment until the three patients in the three little beds were in gales of laughter. At last he said: —

"It's a pile of s—sausages."

"Hit hain't no sausages. Hit's jest a straight, cl'ar pi'cher of a house, an' hit's your house, too, whar brothah David lives at. See? Thar's the winder, an' the other winder hit's on t'othah side whar you can't see hit."

The doctor turned the paper over and regarded it a moment. "Show me the window. I — I see no window on the other side."

Again the three little invalids laughed uproariously at their visitor. David smilingly looked on. How often had he seen the delightful old man amuse himself thus with the children! He would contort his mobile face into all the varying expressions of wonder and dismay, of terror or stupefaction, and his entrance to the children's ward was always greeted with outcries of delight, when the little ones were well enough to allow of such freedom.

"Haven't you one to send to your sister?" asked David, stooping low to the child and speaking quietly. The boy's face lighted with a radiant smile that caused the old man to stand regarding him more intently.

"We'll sen' her this'n of the sea. You reckon hit looks like the ocean whar the ships go a-sailin' to t'othah side o' the world?" He held it in his slender fingers and eyed it critically.

"How did you come to try to make a picture of the sea when you never saw it?"

"Do' know. I feel like I done seed th' ocean when I'm settin' thar on the rock an' them white, big clouds go a-sailin' far — far, like they're goin' to anothah world an' hain't quite touchin' this'n."

"I wondered why you had your ship so high above the sea."

"I don't guess hit's a very good'n," said the child, ruefully, clinging to the scrap of paper with reluctant grasp. "You reckon she'd keer fer this'n?"

"I reckon she'd care for anything you made. Give it to me, and I'll send it to her."

"She tol' me the sea, hit war blue, an' I can't make hit right blue an' soft like she said. That thar blue pencil, hit's too slick. I can't make hit stay on the papah."

"What are these mounds here on either side of the sea?"

"Them's mountains."

"But why did you put mountains in the sea?" The boy looked with wide eyes dreamily past the two men so attentively regarding him.

"I — I reckon I jes' put 'em thar fer to look like the sea hit war on the world. I don't guess the'd be no ocean nor no world 'thout the' war mountains fer to hold everything whar hit belongs at."

"I shall bring you a box of paints to-morrow if the nurse will allow you to have them. I'll provide an oilcloth to spread around so he won't throw paint over your nice clean bed," he said to the pleasant-faced young woman.

"That's all right, Doctor," she said.

"Then you can make the blue stay on, and you can make the ocean with real water, and real blue for the sky and the sea."

The child's eyes glowed. He pulled David down and held him with his arm about his neck, and whispered in his ear, and what he said was: —

"When they're a-pullin' on me to git my hade straight an' my back right, I jes' think 'bout the far—far-away sea, with the ships a-sailin' an' how hit look, an' hit don't hurt so much. I kin b'ar hit a heap bettah. When you comin' back, brothah David?"

"Does it hurt you very much, Hoyle?"

"I reckon hit have to hurt," said the child, with fatalis-

tic resignation. "I don't guess he'd hurt me 'thout he had to." He released David slowly, then pulled him down again. "Don't tell him I 'lowed hit hurted me. I reckon he'd ruthah hurt hisself if he could do me right that-a-way. You guess I — I'm goin' to git shet o' the misery some day?"

"That's what we're trying for, my brave little brother," and the two physicians bade the small patients good-by and walked out upon the street.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH DAVID THRYNG HAS NEWS FROM ENGLAND

As they passed down the street, David shivered and buttoned his light overcoat closer about him.

"Cold?" said the older man.

"Your air is a bit keen here already. I hope it will be the needed tonic for that little chap."

"What were his s—secrets?" David told him.

"He's imaginative — yes — yes. I really would rather hurt myself. He may come on — he may. I've known — I've known — curious, but — Why — Hello — hello! Why — where —" and Doctor Hoyle suddenly darted forward and shook hands with another old gentleman, who was alertly stepping toward them, also thin and wiry, but with a face as impassive as the doctor's was mobile and expressive. "Mr. Stretton, why — why! David — Mr. Stretton, David Thryng —"

"Ah, Mr. Thryng. I am most happy to find you here."

"Doctor Thryng — over here on this side, you know."

"Ah, yes. I had really forgotten. But speaking of titles — I must give this young man his correctly. Lord Thryng — allow me to congratulate you, my lord."

"I fear you mistake me for my cousin, sir," said David, smiling. "I hope you have no ill news from my good uncle; but I am not the David who inherits. I think he is in South Africa — or was by the latest home letters."

Mr. Stretton did not reply directly, but continued smiling, as his manner was, and turned toward David's companion.

"Shall we go to my hotel? I have a great deal to talk over — business which concerns — ahem — ahem — your lordship, on behalf of your mother, having come expressly —" he turned again to David. "Ah, now don't be at all alarmed, I beg of you. I see I have disturbed you. She is quite well, or was a week or more ago. Doctor

Hoyle, you'll accompany us? At my request. Undoubtedly you are interested in your young friend."

Mechanically David walked with the two older men, filled with a strange sinking of the heart, and at the same time with a vague elation. Was he called home by his mother to help her sustain a new calamity? Had the impossible happened? Mr. Stretton's manner continued to be mysteriously deferential toward him, and something in his air reminded David of England and the atmosphere of his uncle's stately home. Had he ever seen the man before? He really did not know.

They reached the hotel shortly and were conducted to Mr. Stretton's private apartment, where wine was ordered, and promptly served. For years thereafter, David never heard the clinking of glasses and bottles borne on a tray without an instant's sickening sinking of the heart, and the foreboding that seemed to drench him with dismay as the glasses were placed on the stand at Mr. Stretton's elbow. When that gentleman, after seeing the waiter disappear, and placing certain papers before him, began speaking, David sat dazedly listening.

What was it all — what was it? The glasses seemed to quiver and shake, throwing dancing flecks of light: and the wine in them — why did it make him think of blood? Were they dead then — all three — his two cousins and his brother — dead? Shot! Killed in a bloody and useless war! He was confounded, and bowing his head in his hands sat thus — his elbows on his knees — waiting, hearing, but not comprehending.

He could think only of his mother. He saw her face, aged and grief-stricken. He knew how she loved the boy she had lost, above all, and now she must turn to himself. He sat thus while the lawyer read a lengthy document, and at the end personally addressed him. Then he lifted his head.

"What is this? My uncle? My uncle gone, too? Do you mean dead? My uncle dead, and I — I his heir?"

The lawyer replied formally, "You are now the head of a most ancient and honorable house. You will have the dignity of the old name to maintain, and are called upon to return to your fatherland and occupy the

home of your ancestors." He took up one of the papers and adjusted his monocle.

For a time David did not speak. At last he rose and, with head erect, extended his hand to the lawyer. "I thank you, sir, for your trouble, — but now, Doctor, shall we return to your house? I must take a little time to adjust my mind to these terrible events. It is like being overtaken with an avalanche at the moment when all is most smiling and perfect."

The lawyer began a few congratulatory remarks, but David stopped him, with uplifted hand.

"It is calamitous. It is too terrible," he said sadly. "And what it brings may be far more of a burden than a joy."

"But the name, my lord, — the ancient and honorable lineage!"

"That last was already mine, and for the title — I have never coveted it, far less all that it entails. I must think it over."

"But, my lord, it is yours! You can't help yourself, you know; a — the — the position is yours, and you will a — fill it with dignity, and — a — let me hope will follow the conservative policy of your honored uncle."

"And I say I must think it over. May I not have a day — a single day — in which to mourn the loss of my splendid brother? Would God he had lived to fill this place!" he said desperately.

The lawyer bowed deferentially, and Doctor Hoyle took David's arm and led him away as if he were his son. Not a word was spoken by either of them until they were again in the doctor's office. There lay the new silk hat, as he had tossed it one side. He took it up and turned it about in his hand.

"You see, David, an old hat is like an old friend, and it takes some time to get wonted to a new one." He gravely laid the old one within easy reach of his arm and restored the new one to its box. Then he sat himself near David and placed his hand kindly on his knee. "You — you have your work laid out for you, my young friend. It's the way in Old England. The stability of our society — our national life demands it."

"I know."

"You must go to your mother."

"Yes, I must go to her."

"Of course, of course, and without delay. Well, I'll take care of the little chap."

"I know you will, better than I could." David lifted his eyes to his old friend's, then turned them away. "I feel him to be a sacred trust." Again he paused. "It — would take a — long time to go to her first?"

"To — her?" For the instant the old man had forgotten Cassandra. Not so David.

"My wife. It will be desperately hard — for her."

"Yes, yes. But your uncle, you know, died of grief, and your m—mother — "

"I know — so the lawyer said. Now at last we'll read mother's letter. He wondered, I suppose, that I didn't look at it when he gave it to me, but I felt conscience-stricken. I've been so filled with my life down there — the peace, the blessed peace and happiness — that I have neglected her — my own mother. I couldn't open and read it with that man's eyes on me. No, no. Stay here, I beg of you, stay. You are different. I want you."

He opened his mother's letter and slowly read it, then passed it to his friend and, rising, walked to the window and stood gazing down into the square. Autumn leaves were being tossed and swirled in dancing flights, like flocks of brown and yellow birds along the street. The sky was overcast, with thin hurrying clouds, and the feeling of autumn was in the air, but David's eyes were blurred, and he saw nothing before him. The doctor's voice broke the silence with sudden impulse.

"In this she speaks as if she knew nothing about your marriage."

"I told you I had neglected her," cried David, contritely.

"But, m—man alive! why — why in the name of all the gods — "

"All England is filled with fools," cried the younger man, desperately. "I could never in the world make them understand me or my motives. I gave it up long ago. I've not told my mother, to save her from a needless sorrow that would be inflicted on her by her friends. They would all flock to her and pester her with their

outcry of 'How very extraordinary!' I can hear them and see them now. I tell you, if a man steps out of the beaten track over there — if he attempts to order his own life, marry to please himself, or cut his coat after any pattern other than the ordinary conventional lines, — even the boys on the street will fling stones at him. Her patronizing friends would, at the very least, politely raise their eyebrows. She is proud and sensitive, and any fling at her sons is a blow to her."

"But what — "

"I say I couldn't tell her. I tell you I have been drinking from the cup of happiness. I have drained it to the last drop. My wife is mine. She does not belong to those people over there, to be talked over, and dined over, and all her beauty and fineness overlooked through their monocles — brutes! My mountain flower in her homespun dress — only poets could understand and appreciate her."

"B—but what were you going to do about it?"

"Do about it? I meant to keep her to myself until the right time came. Perhaps in another year bring her here and begin life in a modest way, and let my mother visit us and see for herself. I was planning it out, slowly — but this — You see, Doctor, their ideas are all warped over there. They accept all that custom decrees and have but the one point of view. The true values of life are lost sight of. They have no hilltops like Cassandra's. Only the poets have."

A quizzical smile played about the old man's mouth. He came and laid his arm across David's shoulders, and the act softened the slight sting of his words. "And — you call yourself a poet?"

"Not that," said the young man, humbly, "but I have been learning. I would have scorned to be called a poet until I learned of this girl and her father. I thought I had ideals, and felt my superiority in consequence, until I came down to the beginnings of things with them."

"Her — her father? Why — he's dead — he — "

"And yet through her I have learned of him. I believe he was a man who walked with God, and at Cassandra's side I have trod in his secret places."

"That's right. I'm satisfied now, about her. You're all right, but — but — your mother."

David turned and walked to the table and sat with his head bowed on his arms. Had he been alone, he would have wept. As it was, he spoke brokenly of his old home, and the responsibilities now so ruthlessly thrust upon him. Of his mother's grief and his own, and of this inheritance that he had never dreamed would be his, and therefore had never desired, now given him by so cruel a blow. He would not shrink from whatever duty or obligation might rest upon him, but how could he adjust his changed circumstances to the conditions he had made for himself by his sudden marriage. At last it was decided that he should sail for England without delay, taking the passage already provisionally engaged for him by Mr. Stretton.

"I can write to Cassandra. She will understand more easily than my mother. She sees into the heart of things. Her thoughts go to the truth like arrows of light. She will see that I must go; but she must never know — I must save her from it if I have to do so at the expense of my own soul — that the reason I cannot take her with me now is that our great friends over there are too small to understand her nature and might despise her. I must go to my mother first and feel my way — see what can be done. Neither of them must be made to suffer."

"That's right, perfectly — but don't wait too long. Just have it out with your mother — all of them; the sooner the simpler, the sooner the simpler."

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH DAVID THRYNG VISITS HIS MOTHER

How wise was the advice of the old doctor to make short work of the confession to his mother, and to face the matter of his marriage bravely with his august friends and connections, David little knew. If his marriage had been rash in its haste, nothing in the future should be done rashly. Possibly he might be obliged to return to America before he made a full revelation that a wife awaited him in that far and but dimly appreciated land. In his mind the matter resolved itself into a question of time and careful adjustment.

Slowly as the boat ploughed through the never resting waters, — slowly as the western land with its dreams and realities drifted farther into the vapors that blended the line of the land and the sea, — so slowly the future unveiled itself and drew him on, into its new dreams, revealing, with the inevitable progression of the hours, a life heretofore shrouded and only vaguely imagined, as a glowing reality filled with opportunity and power.

He felt his whole nature expand and become imbued with intoxicating ambitions, as if hereafter he would be swept onward to ride through life triumphant, even as the boat was riding the sea, surmounting its mysterious depths and taking its unerring way in spite of buffeting of winds and beating of waves.

Still young, with renewed vitality, his hopes turned to the future, recognizing the tremendous scope for his energies which his own particular prospects presented. Often he stood alone in the prow, among the coils of rope, and watched the distance unroll before him, while the salt breeze played with his clustering hair and filled his lungs. He loved the long sweep of the prow, as it divided the water and cast it foaming on either side, in opaline and turquoise tints, shifting and falling into the indigo depths of the vastness around.

In thought he spanned the wide spaces and leaped still toward the future; before him the gray-haired mother who trembled to hold him once more in her arms, behind him the young wife waiting his return, enclosing him serenely and adoringly in her heart.

Each day while on shipboard, David wrote to Cassandra, voluminously. He found it a pleasant way of passing the hours. He described his surroundings and unfolded such of his anticipations as he felt she could best understand and with which she could sympathize, trying to explain to her what the years to come might hold for them both, and telling her always to wait with patience for his return. This could not be known definitely until he had looked into the state of his uncle's affairs — which would hereafter be his own.

Sometimes his letter contained only a review of some of the happiest hours they had spent together, as if he were placing his thoughts of those blessed days on paper, that they might be for their mutual communing. Sometimes he discoursed of the calamity he had suffered, the uselessness of his brother's death, and the cruelty and wastefulness of war. At such times he was minded to write her of the opportunity now given him to serve his country, and the power he might some day attain to promote peace and avert rash legislation.

Never once did he allow an inadvertent word to slip from his pen, whereby she could suspect that she, as his wife, might be a cause of embarrassment to him, or a clog in the wheel of the chariot which from now on was to bear him triumphantly among his social friends or political enemies. Never would he disturb the sweet serenity that encompassed her. Yet well he knew what an incongruity she would appear should he present her now — as she had stood by her loom, or in the ploughed field at his side — to the company he would find in his mother's home.

Simple and direct as she was, she would walk over their conventions and proprieties, and never know it. How strange many of those customs of theirs would appear to her, and how unnecessary! He feared for her most in her utter ignorance of everything pertaining to the daily existence of the over-civilized circle to which the changed conditions of his life would bring her.

Much, he knew, would pass unseen by her, but soon she would begin to understand, and to wince under their exclamations of "How extraordinary!" The masklike expression would steal over her face, her pride would encase her spirit in the deep reserve he himself had found so hard to penetrate, and he could see her withdrawing more and more from all, until at last — Ah! it must not be. He must manage very carefully, lest Doctor Hoyle's prophecy indeed be fulfilled.

At last the lifting of the veil to the eastward revealed the bold promontory of Land's End, and soon, beyond, the fair green slopes of his own beautiful Old England. For all of the captious criticism he had fallen in the way of bestowing upon her, how he loved her! He felt as if he must throw up his arms and shout for joy. Suddenly she had become his, with a sense of possession new to him, and sweet to feel. The orderliness and stereotyped lines of her social system against which he had rebelled, and the iron bars of her customs which his soul had abhorred in the past, — against which his spirit had bruised and beaten itself, — now lured him on as a security for things stable and fine. In subtile ways as yet unrealized, he was being drawn back into the cage from which he had fled for freedom and life.

How quickly he had become accustomed to the air of deference in Mr. Stretton's continual use of his newly acquired title — "my lord." Why not? It was his right. The same laws which had held him subservient before, now gave him this, and he who a few months earlier had been proudly ploughing his first furrows in his little leased farm on a mountain meadow, now walked with lifted head, "to the manor born," along the platform, and entered the first-class compartment with Mr. Stretton, where a few rich Americans had already installed themselves.

David noticed, with inward amusement, their surreptitious glances, when the lawyer addressed him; how they plumed themselves, yet tried to appear nonchalant and indifferent to the fact that they were riding in the same compartment with a lord. In time he would cease to notice even such incongruities as this tacit homage from a professedly title-scorning people.

David's mother had moved into the town house, whither his uncle had sent for her, when, stricken with grief, he had lain down for his last brief illness. The old servants had all been retained, and David was ushered to his mother's own sitting-room by the same household dignitary who was wont to preside there when, as a lad, he had been allowed rare visits to his cousins in the city.

How well he remembered his fine, punctilious old uncle, and the feeling of awe tempered by anticipation with which he used to enter those halls. He was overwhelmed with a sense of loss and disaster as he glanced up the great stairway where his cousins were wont to come bounding down to him, handsome, hearty, romping lads.

It had been a man's household, for his aunt had been dead many years — a man's household characterized by a man's sense of heavy order without the many touches of feminine occupation and arrangement which tend to soften a man's half military reign. As he was being led through the halls, he noticed a subtile change which warmed his quick senses. Was it the presence of his mother and Laura? His entrance interrupted an animated conversation which was being held between the two as the man-servant announced his name, and, in another instant, his mother was in his arms.

"Dear little mother! Dear little mother!" But she was not small. She was tall and dignified, and David had to stoop but little to bring his eyes level with hers.

"David, I'm here, too." A hand was laid on his arm, and he released his mother to turn and look into two warm brown eyes.

"And so the little sister is grown up," he said, embracing her, then holding her off at arm's-length. "Five years! When I look at you, mother, they don't seem so long — but Laura here!"

"You didn't expect me to stay a little girl all my life, did you, David?"

"No, no." He took her by the shoulder and shook her a little and pinched her cheeks. "What roses! Why, sis, I say, you know, I'm proud of you. What have you been up to, anyway?" He flung himself on the sofa and pulled her down beside him. "Give an account of yourself."

"I've gone in for athletics."

"Right."

"And — Oh! lots of things. You give an account of yourself."

David glanced at his mother. She was seated opposite them, regarding him with brimming eyes. No, he could not give an account of himself yet. He would wait until he and his mother were alone. He lifted Laura's heavy hair, which, confined only by a great bow of black ribbon, hung streaming down her back, in a dark mass that gave her a tousled, unkempt look, and which, taken together with her dead black dress, and her dark tanned skin, roughened by exposure to wind and sun, greatly marred her beauty, in spite of her roses and the warmth of her large dark eyes.

As David surveyed his sister, he thought of Cassandra, and was minded then and there to describe her — to attempt to unveil the events of the past year, and make them see and know, as far as possible, what his life had been. He held this thought a moment, poised ready for utterance — a moment of hesitation as to how to begin, and then forever lost, as his mother began speaking.

"Laura hasn't come out yet. As events have turned, it is just as well, for her chances, naturally, will be much better now than they would have been if we had had her coming out last year."

"I don't see how, mamma, with all this heavy black. I can't come out until I leave it off, and it will be so long to wait." Laura pouted a little, discontentedly, then flushed a disfiguring flush of shame under her dark skin, as she caught the look in her brother's eyes. "Not but what I shall keep on mourning for Bob, as long as I live — he was such a dear," she added, her eyes filling with quick, impulsive tears. "But how you make out my chances will be better now, mamma, I can't see, really, — I look such a fright."

"Chances for what?" asked David, dryly.

"For matrimony — naturally," his sister flung out defiantly, half smiling through her tears. "Don't you know that's all a girl of my age lives for — matrimony and a kennel? I mean to have one, now we will have our own preserves. It will be ripping, you know."

"Certainly, our own preserves," said David, still dryly,

thinking how Cassandra would wonder what preserves were, and what she would say if told that in preserves, wild harmless animals were kept from being killed by the common people for food, in order that those of his own class might chase them down and kill them for their amusement.

"Oh, David, I remember how you used to be always putting on a look like that, and thinking a lot of nasty things under your breath. I hoped you would come home vastly improved. Was it what I said about matrimony? Mamma knows it's true."

"Hardly as you put it, my child; there is much besides for a girl to think about."

"You said 'chances' yourself, mamma."

"Certainly, but that is for me to consider. You must remember that it was you who refused to have your coming out last year."

"I didn't want my good times cut short then, mamma, and have to take up proprieties — or at least I would have had to be dreadfully proper for a while, anyway — and now — why I have to be naturally; and here I am unable to come out for another year yet and my hair streaming down my back all the time. I'm sure I can't see how my chances are in the least improved by it all; and by that time I shall be so old."

"Oh, you will be quite young enough," said David.

"You occupy a far different position now, child. To make your début as Lady Laura will give you quite another place in the world. Your headstrong postponement, fortunately, will do no harm. It will make your introduction to the circle where you are eventually to move, much simpler."

Laura lifted her eyebrows and glanced from her mother to her brother. "Very well, mamma, but one thing you might as well know now. I shan't drop some of my friends — if being Lady Laura lifts me above them as high as the moon. I like them, and I don't care."

She whistled, and a beautiful, silken-haired setter crept from under the sofa whereon she had been sitting, and wriggled about after the manner of guilty dogs.

"Laura, dear!"

"Yes, mamma, I've been hiding him with my skirts by

sitting there. He was bad and followed me in. We've been out riding together." She stroked his silken coat with her riding crop. "Mamma won't allow him in here, and he jolly well knows it. Bad Zip, bad, sir! Look at him. Isn't he clever? I must go and dress for dinner. Mamma wants you to herself, I know, and Mr. Stretton will be here soon. You can't think, David, how glad I am we have you back! You couldn't think it from my way — but I am — rather! It's been awful here — simply awful, since the boys all left."

Again her eyes filled with quick tears, and she dashed out with the dog bounding about her and leaping up to thrust his great tongue in her face. "You are too big for the house, Zip. Down, sir!" In an instant she was back, putting her tousled head in at the door.

"David, when mamma is finished with you, come out and see my dogs. I have five already, and Nancy is going to litter soon. Calkins is to take them into the country to-morrow, for they are just cooped up here." She withdrew, and David heard her heavy-soled shoes clatter down the long halls. He and his mother smiled as they listened, looking into each other's eyes.

"She is a dear child, but life means only a good time to her as yet."

"Well, let it. She has splendid stuff in her and is bound to make a splendid woman."

"She's right, David. It has been awful since your brother left." David sat beside her and placed his hand on hers. Again it was in his mind to tell her of Cassandra, and again he was stopped by the tenor of her next remark. "You see how it is, my son; Laura can't understand, but you will."

"I'm not sure that I do. Open your heart to me, mother, tell me what you mean."

"My dear son. I don't like to begin with worries. It is so sweet to have you back in the home. May you always stay with us."

"I don't mind the worries, mother," he said tenderly; "I am here to help you. What is it?"

"It is only that, although we have inherited the title and estates, we are not there. We will be received, of course, but at first only by those who have axes to grind.

There are so many such, and it is hard to protect one's self from them. For instance, there is Lady Willisbeck. Her own set have cut her completely for — certain reasons — there is no need to retail unpleasant gossip, — but she was one of the first to call. Her daughter, Lady Isabel, gave Laura that dog, — but all the more because Laura and Lady Isabel were in school together, and were on the same hockey team, they will have that excuse for clinging to us like burs.

"Lady Willisbeck would like very much now, for her daughter's sake, to win back her place in society, although she did not seem to value it for herself. Long before her mother's life became common talk, — because she was infatuated with your cousin Lyon, Lady Isabel chose Laura for her chum, and the two have worked up a very romantic situation out of the affair. You see I have cause for anxiety, David, since the title is only mine and Laura's by courtesy, we must not presume upon it."

He still held her hand, looking kindly in her face. "Is Lady Isabel the right sort?" he asked.

"What do you mean by 'the right sort,' David? She isn't like her mother, naturally, or I would have been more decided; but she is not the right sort for us. Lady Willisbeck is ostracized, and it is a grave matter. Her daughter will be ostracized with her, unless she can find a chaperone of quality to champion her — to — to — well, you understand that Laura can't afford to make her début handicapped with such a friendship. Not now."

"I fail to see until I know more of her friend."

"But, David, we can't be visionary now. We must be practical and face the difficulties of our situation. We are honorably entitled to all that the inheritance implies, but it is another thing to avail ourselves of it. Your uncle led a most secluded life. He had no visitors, and was known only among men, and politically as a close conservative. His seat in the House meant only that. So now we enter a circle in which we never moved before, and we are not of it. For the present, our deep mourning is prohibitory, but it is also Laura's protection, although she does not know it." His mother paused. She was not regarding him. She seemed to be looking into the future, and a little line, which had formed during the years of David's absence, deepened in her forehead.

"Be a little more explicit, mother. Protection from what?"

"From undesirable people, dear. We are very conspicuous; to be frank, we are new. My own family connections are all good, but they will not be the slightest help to Laura in maintaining her position. We have always lived in the country, and know no one."

"You have refinement and good taste, mother."

"I know it; that and this inheritance and the title."

"Isn't that 'protection' enough? I really fail to see — Whatever would please you would be right. You may have what friendships you —"

"Not at all, David. Everything is iron-bound. They are simply watching lest we bring a lot of common people in our train. Things grow worse and worse in that way. There are so many rich tradespeople who are struggling to get in, and clinging desperately to the skirts of the poorer nobility. Of course, it all goes to show what a tremendous thing good birth is, and the iron laws of custom are, after all, a proper safeguard and should be respected. Nevertheless we, who are so new, must not allow ourselves to become stepping-stones. It is perfectly right.

"That is why I said this period of mourning is Laura's protection. She will have time to know what friendships are best, and an opportunity to avoid undesirable ones. You have been away so long, David, where the class lines are not so rigidly drawn, that you forget — or never knew. It is my duty, without any foolish sentiment, to guard Laura and see to it that her coming out is what it should be. For one thing, she is so very plain. If she were a beauty, it would help, but her plainness must be compensated for in other ways. She will have a large settlement, Mr. Stretton thinks, if your uncle's interests are not too much jeopardized in South Africa by this terrible war. That is something you will have to look into before you take your seat in the House."

"Oh, mother, mother! I can't —"

"My dear boy, your brother died for his country, and can you not give a little of your life for it? I can rely on you to be practically inclined, now that you are placed at the head of such a family? I'm glad now you never

cared for Muriel Hunt. She could never have filled the position as her ladyship, your uncle's wife, did. She was Lady Thomasia Harcourt Glendyne of Wales. Beside her, Muriel would appear silly. It is most fortunate you have no such entanglement now."

"Mother, mother! I am astounded! I never dreamed my dear, beautiful mother could descend to such worldliness. You are changed, mother. There is something fundamentally wrong in all this."

She looked up at him, aghast at his vehemence.

"My son, my son! Let us have only love between us — only love. I am not changed. I was content as I was, nor ever tried to enter a sphere above me. Now that this comes to me — forced on me by right of English law — I take it thankfully, with all it brings. I will fill the place as it should be filled, and Laura shall do the same, and you also, my son. As for Muriel Hunt, I will make concessions if — if your happiness demands it."

David groaned inwardly. "No, mother, no. It goes deeper than Muriel; it goes deeper." They had both risen. She placed her hands on his shoulders and looked levelly in his eyes, and her own lightened, through tears held bravely back.

"It may well go deeper than Muriel, and still not go very deep."

"And yet the time was when Muriel Hunt was thought quite deep enough," he said sadly, still looking in his mother's eyes — but she only continued:—

"Never doubt for a moment, dear, that Laura's welfare and yours are dearer to me than life. You are very weary; I see it in your eyes. Have you been to your apartment? Clark will show you." She kissed his brow and departed.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH DAVID THRYNG ADJUSTS HIS LIFE TO NEW CONDITIONS

DAVID stood where his mother had left him, dazed, hurt, sad. He was desperately minded to leave all and flee back to the hills — back to the life he had left in Canada. He saw the clear, true look of Cassandra's eyes meeting his. His heart called for her; his soul cried out within him. He felt like one launched on an irresistible current which was sweeping him ever nearer to a maelstrom wherein he was inevitably to be swallowed up.

He perceived that to his mother the established order of things there in her little island was sacred — an arrangement to be still further upheld and solidified. She had suddenly become a part of a great system, intrusted with a care for its maintenance and stability, as one of its guardians. Before, it had mattered little to her, for she was not of it. Now it was very different.

Slowly David followed Clark to his own apartments. He had been given those of the old lord, his uncle. Everything about him was dark, massive, and rich, but without grace. His bags and boxes had been unpacked and his dinner suit laid in readiness, and Clark stood stiffly awaiting orders.

"Will you have a shave, my lord?"

The man's manner jarred on him. It was obsequious, and he hated it. Yet it was only the custom. Clark was simple-hearted and kindly, filling his little place in the upholding of the system of which he was a part; had his manner been different, a shade more familiar, David would have resented it and ordered him out, — but of this David was not conscious. In spite of his scruples, he was born and bred an aristocrat.

"No — a — I'll shave myself." Still the man waited and, taking up David's coat, flicked a particle of dust from the collar. "I don't want anything. You may go."

'Thank you." Clark melted quietly out of the apartment.

"Thanks me for being rude to him," thought David, irritably; "I shall take pleasure in being rude to him. My God! What a farce life is over here! The whole thing is a farce."

He shaved himself and cut his chin, and when he appeared later with a patch of court-plaster thereon, Clark commented to himself on "his lordship's" inability to do the shaving properly.

As David thought over his mother's words — her outlook on life — his sister's idle aims — the companionships she must have and the kind of talk to which she must listen — he grew more and more annoyed. He contrasted it all with the past. His mother, who had been so noble and fine, seemed to have lost individuality, to have become only a segment of a circle which it was henceforth to be her highest care to keep intact. Laura must become a part of the same sacred ring, and he, too, must join hands with those who formed it and make it his duty to keep others out.

There were also other circles guarded and protected by this one — circles within circles — each smaller and more exclusive than the last. The object of the huge game of life over here seemed to be to keep the great mass of those whom they regarded as commonalty out of any one of the circles, while striving individually each to climb into the one next above, and more contracted. The most maddening thing of all was to find his grave, dignified mother drawn in and made a partaker in this meaningless strife.

Still essentially an outsider, David could look with larger vision — the far-seeing vision of the western land, the hilltops and the dividing sea, — and to him now the circles seemed verily the concentric rings of the maelstrom into which events were hurrying him. Would he be able to rise from the swirling flotsam and ride free?

The deeper philosophy underlying it all he as yet but vaguely understood; that the highest good for all could only be maintained by stability in the commonwealth; as the tremendous rock foundations of the earth are a support for the growth thereon of all perfection, all grace and beauty; that the concentric rings, when rightly

understood, should become a means of purification — of reward for true worth — of power for noblest service, and not for personal ambition and the unmolested gratification of vicious tastes.

David did not as yet know that his clear-seeing wife could help him to the attainment of his greatest possibilities, right here where he feared to bring her — the wife of whom he dare not tell his mother. Blinded by the world's estimates which he still had sense enough to despise, he did not know that the key to its deepest secrets lay in her heart, nor that of the two, her heritage of the large spirit and the inward-seeing eye direct to the Creator's meanings was the greater heritage.

Lady Thryng found it possible to have a few words with the lawyer before David appeared, and impressed upon him the necessity of interesting her son in this new field by showing him avenues for power and work.

"I don't quite understand the boy," she said. "After seeing the world and going his own way, I really thought he would outgrow that sort of moody sentimentalism, but it seems to be returning. He is quixotic enough to turn away from everything here and go back to Canada, unless you can awaken his interest."

"I see, I see," said the lawyer.

"Mere personal ambition will not satisfy him," added his mother, proudly. "He must see opportunities for service. He must understand that he is needed."

"I see. I understand. He must be dealt with along the line of his nobler impulses — ahem — ahem —" and David appeared.

His mother rose and took his arm to walk out to dinner, while Laura, who should have gone with Mr. Stretton, did not see his proffered arm, but, provokingly indifferent, strolled out by herself.

David, absorbed in his own thoughts, did not notice his sister's careless mien, but the mother observed the independent and boyish swing of her daughter's shoulders, and resented it with a slightly reproving glance after they were seated.

Laura lifted her eyebrows and one shoulder with an irritating half shrug. "What is it, mamma?" she asked, but Lady Thryng allowed the question to go unheeded, and

turned her attention to the two gentlemen during the rest of the meal.

All through dinner David was haunted by Cassandra's talk with him, the night he dreamed she was being swept out of his arms forever by a swift, cold current which, from a little purling stream high up on a mountain top, had become a dark, relentless flood, overwhelming them utterly. What was she doing now? Did she know she was in that terrible flood? Was she really being swept from him? Ah, never, never! He would not allow it, if he must break all hearts but hers.

The meal progressed sombrely and heavily, with much ceremony, although they were so few. Was his mother practising for the future that she kept such rigid state? He suspected as much, and that Laura was being trained to the right way of carrying herself, but that and the real sorrow of the family over their bereavement made a most oppressive atmosphere. Might this be the shadow Cassandra had seen lying across their future? Only a passing cloud — a vapor; it must be only that.

Laura and her mother withdrew early, leaving David and the lawyer together, when Mr. Stretton immediately launched into talk of David's prospects and resources. In spite of himself, the gloom of the dinner hour slipped from him, and soon he was taking the liveliest interest in what might be possible for him here and now.

Although not one to be easily turned from a chosen path by outside influence, David yet had that almost fatal gift of the imaginative mind of seeing things from many sides, until at times they took on a kaleidoscopic reversibility. Now this unlooked-for development of his life opened to him a vista — new — and yet old, old as England herself.

While digging deep into the causes of his former discontent, he had come to strike his spade upon the rock foundations whereon all this complicated superstructure of English society and national life was builded. He saw that every nobleman inherited with his title and his lands a responsibility for the welfare of the whole people, from the poorest laborer in the ditch or the coal mine, to the head wearing the crown; and that it was the blindness of individuals like himself or his uncle before him, their misuse or unscrupulous indifference to and abuse of power, which

had brought about those conditions under which the masses were writhing, and against which they were crying out. He saw that it was only by the earnest efforts of the few who did understand — the few who were not indifferent — that the stability of English government was still her glory.

At last he rose and lifted his arms high above his head, then dropped them to his side. "I see." He held up his head and looked off as he had done when he stood on the prow of the steamship, with the salt breeze tossing his hair. "A little of this came to me as I crossed the ocean, when I saw the green slopes of England again. I knew I loved her, and the old feeling of impotence that hounded me in the past, when I could do nothing but rebel, slipped from me. I felt what it might be to have power — to become effective instead of being obliged to chafe under the yoke of an imposed submission to things which are wrong — things which those who are in power might set right if they would. I believe, for a moment, Mr. Stretton, I felt it all."

He paused and bowed his head. All at once in the midst of his exaltation, he saw Cassandra standing white and still, as he had seen her on the hilltop before their little cabin, looking after him when he bade her good-by; and just as he then turned and went swiftly back to her, so now in his soul he turned to her yearningly and took her to his breast. Still penetrating the sweet, white halo of this vision, he heard the voice of Mr. Stretton deferentially droning on.

"And with your resources — the wealth which, with a little care and thought just now at this crucial moment, will be yours — "

Still David stood with bowed head.

"It is as if you were predestined, my lord, to step in at a critical time of your country's need — with brains, education, conscience, and wealth — with every obstacle swept away."

Still before him stood Cassandra, white and silent; he could see only her.

"Every obstacle swept away," repeated the lawyer.

"And Cassandra, God help her and me." David slowly turned, lifted a glass of wine from the table, and drank it.

"Well, so be it, so be it," he said aloud. "We'll join mother and Laura." At the door he paused, "You spoke of education — the learning of a physician is but little in the line of statesmanship. How soon will I be expected to take my seat?"

"If you ask my advice, my lord, I would say better wait a year. It will be advisable for you to go yourself to South Africa and look into your uncle's investments there — as a private individual, of course, not as a public servant. Two-thirds of the receipts have fallen off since the war; learn what may be saved from the wreckage, or if there be a wreckage. I'm inclined to think not all, for the investments were varied. Your uncle may have been a silent member, but he was certainly a man of good business judgment —" Mr. Stretton paused and coughed a little apologetically before adding: "Not an inherited talent, only — ah — cultivated — cultivated — you know. Good business judgment is not a trait inherent in our peerage, as a rule."

David was amused and entered the drawing-room with a smile on his face. His mother was pleased and rose instantly, coming forward with both hands extended to take his. He understood it as a welcome back to the family circle, the quiet talks and the evening lamp, less formal than the oppressive dinner had been. He held her hands thus offered and kissed the little anxious line on her brow, then playfully smoothed it with his finger.

"We mustn't let it become permanent, you know, mother."

"No, David. It will go now you are at home."

He did not know that his mother and Laura had been having a lively discussion apropos of the silent tilt at the dinner-table, his sister pleading for a return to the old ways, and a release from such state and ceremony. "At least while we are by ourselves, mamma. Anyway, I know David will just hate it, and I don't see what good a title is if we must become perfect slaves to it."

David crossed the room and sat down before the piano. "How strange this old place seems without the others — Bob, and the cousins, and uncle himself! We weren't admitted often — but —"

"Sh — sh —" said Laura, who had followed him and

stood at his side. "Don't remind mamma. She remembers too much — all the time. Play the 'King's Hunting Jig,' David. Remember how you used to play it for me every evening after dinner, when I was a girl?"

"Do I remember? Rather! I have done nothing with the piano since then — when you were a girl. I'll play it for you now, while you are a girl."

"But I really am grown up now, David. It's quite absurd for me to go about like this. It's only because mamma chooses to have it so. She even keeps a governess for me still."

"To her you are a child, and to me you are still a girl, and a mighty fine one."

"It's so good to have you back, David! You haven't forgotten the Jig! Where's your flute? Get it, and I'll accompany you. I can drum a little now — after a fashion. We'll let them talk."

So they amused themselves for the rest of the evening with music, and Lady Thryng's face lost the strained and harassed expression it had worn all during dinner, and took on a look of contentment. After this the days were spent by David in going over his uncle's large mass of papers and correspondence, with the aid of Mr. Stretton and a secretary. A colossal task it proved to be.

No one, even his lawyer, who had his confidence more than any one else, knew in what the old Lord Thryng's wealth really consisted, although Mr. Stretton surmised much of his surplus income of late years had been placed in Africa. As his papers had not been set in order or tabulated for years, every note, land loan, mortgage, and rental had to be unearthed slowly and laboriously from among a mass of written matter and figures, more or less worthless; for the old lord had a habit of saving every scrap of paper — the backs of notes and letters — for summing up accounts and jotting down memoranda and dates.

Certain hours of each day David devoted to this labor, collecting his papers in a small room opening off from the law chambers of Mr. Stretton, where for years his uncle had kept a private safe. Conscientiously he toiled at the monotonous task, until weeks, then months, slipped by, hardly noticed, ignoring all social life. When his mother

or Laura broached the subject, he would say: "'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' and this must be done first."

He was not unmindful of his wife during this interval, but wrote frequently, and, to guard against any danger of her being left without resources should something unforeseen befall him, he placed in Bishop Towers's hands the residue of money remaining to him in Canada, for Cassandra. He wrote her to use it as occasion required, and not to spare it, that it was hers without restriction. He sent her the names of books he wished she would read — that she should write the publishers for them. He begged her to do no more weaving for money — but only for her own amusement, and above all to trust and be happy, not to be sorrowful for this long delay, which he would cut as short as he could.

Much of his occupation he could not explain to her, and ofttimes it was hard to find matter for his letters; then he would revert to reminiscence. These were the letters she loved best and sometimes wept over, and these were the letters that often left him dreamy and sad, and sometimes made him distraught when his mother and Laura talked over their affairs, so utterly alien to his thoughts and longings.

Cassandra's replies were for the most part short, but they were sent with unfailing regularity, and always they seemed to bring with them a breath from her own mountain top — naïve — tender — absolutely trusting — often quaintly worded, and telling of the simple, innocent things of her life. He could see that she held herself in reserve, even as her nature was; a psychologic something was held back. He could not dream what it might be, but reasoned with himself that it was only that she found it harder to unveil her thoughts by means of the pen than in speech.

One day, as he rode alone in the park, he noticed that the leaf buds were swelling. What! Was spring upon them? A white fog was lifting, and every twig and stem held its tiny pearl of wetness. All the earth glistened and was clean and looked as if greenness was returning. He regarded the artificial effects around him, the long lines of trees and set clumps of shrubbery, and was seized with a desire well-nigh irresistible for the wild roads and rugged

steeps — the wandering streams and sound of falling waters.

He saw it all again, the blossoming spring where Cassandra sat waiting for him, and he resolved to start without delay — to go to her and bring her back with him. All this sordid calculation of the amount of his fortune — his mother's and sister's shares — the annuities of poor dependents — stocks to be bought — interest to be invested — the government, and his future part therein, pah! It must wait! He would have his own. His heritage should not be his curse.

He returned in haste that day, only to learn that certain facts had been unearthed which necessitated a journey into Wales, where interests of the former Lady Thryng's estates were concerned. His uncle had inherited all from her with the exception of certain bequests to relatives with which he had been intrusted. Some of the records had been lost, and whether the beneficiaries were dead or not, none knew, but now and then letters came pleading for a continuance of former favors, and recalling obligations.

Mr. Stretton had been ill for a week, and now that the records were found, David must go, and go at once. The lawyer had many subjects for investigation to deliver to David. There was the death-bed request of an old nurse of his aunt, who had an annuity, that it be extended to her crippled granddaughter. She lived among the Cornish hills. Would he hunt the family up and learn if they were worthy or impostors? His uncle had been endlessly plagued with such importunities — and so on — and so on.

Yes, certainly David would go. He made a mental reservation that he would sail, without returning to London, and then make a clean breast of his affairs by letter to his mother. She had improved in health during the winter, and he thought his information would be received by her with more equanimity than it would have been earlier. Moreover, she had broached the subject of marriage to him more than once, but always in one of her most worldly moods, when he shrank from hearing Cassandra spoken of as he knew she would be — when he could not hear her discussed, nor reply with calmness to such questions as he knew must ensue.

David had little time to brood over his peculiar difficulty,

as his short journey was full of business interest and new experiences. Yet the Cornish hills awoke in him a still greater eagerness for the mountains of his dreams, and, after securing his passage, he went to his hotel to prepare the letter to his mother.

It is marvellous what trivial events alter destinies. In this instance it was the yapping of a small dog which changed David's plans, and finally sent him to South Africa instead of America. While paying his bill at the hotel, a telegram was handed him, which he tore open as the clerk was counting out his change. He still held in his hand the letter to his mother which he was on the point of dropping in the letter-box at his elbow. Instead, he thrust it in his pocket, along with the crushed telegram, and, taking a cab, hastened to the steamship offices to cancel his date for sailing.

The message read: "Return with all speed to London. Mr. Stretton lying in the hospital with a fractured skull." Thus it was that Lady Tredwell's pet spaniel, old and vicious, yapping at the heels of Mr. Stretton's restive horse, while my lady's maid — who should have been leading him out for an airing — was absorbed in listening to the compliments of one of the park guards, played so dire a part in the affairs of David Thryng.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN WHICH THE OLD DOCTOR AND LITTLE HOYLE COME BACK TO THE MOUNTAINS

CASSANDRA, seated on the great hanging rock before her cabin, watched the sunrise where David had so often stood and waited for the dawn during his winter there alone. This morning the mists obscured the valleys and the base of the mountains, while the sky and the whole earth glowed with warm rose color.

Presently she rose and walked with lifted head into the cabin, and prepared to light a fire on the hearth. In the canvas room the bed was made smoothly, as she had made it the morning David left. No one had slept in it since, although Cassandra spent most of her days there. Everything he had used was carefully kept as he had left it. His microscope, covered from dust, stood with the last specimen still under the lens. A book they were reading together lay on the corner shelf, with the mark still in the place where they had read last.

After lighting the fire, she sat near it, watching the flames steal up from the small pile of fat pine chips underneath, sending up red tongues of fire, until the great logs were wrapped in the hot embrace of the flames, trembling, quivering, and leaping high in their mad joy, transmuting all they touched.

"It's like love," she murmured, and smiled. "Only it's quicker. It does in one hour what love takes a lifetime to do. Those logs might have lain on the ground and rotted if they'd been left alone, but now the fire just holds them and caresses them like, and they grow warm and glow like the sun, and give all they can while they last, until they're almost too bright to look at. I reckon God has been right good to me not to let me lie and rot my life away. He sent David to set my heart on fire, and I guess I can wait for him to come back to me in God's own time."

She rose and brought from the canvas room a basket of

willow, woven in open-work pattern. It was a gift from Azalea, who had learned from her mother the art of basket weaving. Some said Azalea's grandmother was half Indian, and that it was from her they had learned their quaint patterns and shapes, and that she, and her Indian mother before her, had been famous basket weavers.

This pretty basket was filled with very delicate work of fine muslin, much finer than anything Cassandra had ever worked upon before. Her hands no longer showed signs of having been employed in rough, coarse tasks; they were soft and white. She placed the basket of dainty sewing on the same table which had served as an altar when she knelt beside David and was made his wife. It was serving as an altar still, bearing that basket of delicate work.

She had become absorbed in a book — not one of those David had suggested. It is doubtful, had he been there, whether he would have really liked to see her reading this one, although it was written by Thackeray, dear to all English hearts. It is more than probable that he would have thought his young wife hardly need be enlightened upon just the sort of things with which *Vanity Fair* enriches the understanding.

Be it how it may, Cassandra was reading *Vanity Fair*, which she found in the box of books David had opened so long before. While she read she worked with her fingers, incessantly, at a piece of narrow lace, with a shuttle and very fine thread. This she did so mechanically that she could easily read at the same time by propping the book open on the table before her. For a long time she sat thus, growing more and more interested, until the fire burned low, and she rose to replenish it.

The logs were piled beside the door of the small kitchen David had built for her, and where he had placed the cook stove. She had come up early this morning, because she was sad over his last letter, in which he had told her of his disappointment in having to cancel his passage to America. Hopeful and cheery though the letter was, it had struck dismay to her heart; it was her way when sad, and longing for her husband, to go up to her little cabin — her own home — and think it all over alone and thus regain her equanimity.

Here she read and thought things out by herself. What

strange people they were over there! Or perhaps that was so long ago — they might have changed by this time. Surely they must have changed, or David would have said something about it. He never would become a lord, to be one of such people — never — never! It was not at all like David.

A figure appeared in the doorway. "Cassandra! What are you doing here all by yourself?"

It was Betty Towers. Cassandra ran joyfully forward and clasped the little woman in her arms. Almost carrying her in, she sat her by the pleasant open fire. Then, seeing Betty's eyes regarding her questioningly, she suddenly dropped into her own chair by the table, leaned her head upon her arms, and began to weep, silently.

In an instant Betty was kneeling by her side, holding the lovely head to her breast. "Dearest! You shan't cry. You shan't cry like that. Tell me all about it. Why on earth doesn't Doctor Thryng come home?"

Cassandra lifted her head and dried her tears. "He was coming. The last letter but one said he was to sail next day. Then last night came another saying the only man who could look after very important business for him had been thrown from his horse and hurt so bad he may die, and David had to give up his passage and go back to London. He may have to go to Africa. He felt right bad — but —"

"Goodness me, child! Why, he has no business now more important than you! What a chump!"

Cassandra stiffened proudly and drew away, taking up her shuttle and beginning her work calmly as if nothing had happened to destroy her composure.

"I've not written David — anything to disturb him — or make him hurry home."

"Oh, Cassandra, Cassandra! You're not treating either him or yourself fairly."

"For him — I can't help it; and for me, I don't care. Other women have got along as best they could in these mountains, and I can bear what they have borne."

"But why on earth haven't you told him?"

Cassandra bent her head lower over her bit of lace and was silent. Betty drew her chair nearer and put her arms about the drooping girl.

"Can't you tell me all about it, dear?"

"Not if you are going to blame David."

"I won't, you lovely thing! I can't, since he doesn't know — but why —"

"At first I couldn't speak. I tried, but I couldn't. Then he had to take Hoyle North, and I thought he would see for himself when he came back — or I could tell him by that time. Then came that dreadful news — you know — four, all dead. His brother and his two cousins all killed, and his uncle dying of grief; and he had to go to his mother or she might die, too, and then he found so much to do. Now, you know he has to be a —"

She was going to say "a lord," but, happening to glance down at her open book, the name of "Lord Steyne" caught her eye, and it seemed to her a title of disgrace. She must talk with David before she allowed him to be known as "a lord," so she ended hurriedly: "He has to be a different kind of a man, now — not a doctor. He has a great many things to do and look after. If I told him he would leave everything and come to me, even if he ought not, and if he couldn't come, he would be troubled and unhappy. Why should I make him unhappy? When he does come home, he'll be glad — oh, so glad! Why need he know when the knowing will do no good, and when he will come to me as soon as he can, anyway?"

"You strange girl, Cassandra! You brave old dear! But he must come, that's all. It is his right to know and to come. I can tell him. Let me."

"No, no. Please, Mrs. Towers, you must not. He will come back as soon as he can; and now — now — he will be too late, since he — he did not sail when he meant to."

Betty rose with a set look about the mouth. "Unless we cable him, Cassandra. Would there be time in that case? Come, you must tell me."

"No, no," wailed the girl. "And now he must not know until he comes. It would be cruel. I will not let you write him or cable him either."

"Then what will you do?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'll think out a way. You'll help me think, but you must promise me not to write to David. I send him a letter every day, but I never tell him anything that would make him uneasy, because he

nas very important business there for his mother and sister, even more than for himself. You see how bad I would be to write troubling things to him when he couldn't help me or come to me." A light broke over Betty Towers's face.

"I can think out a way, dear, of course I can. Just leave matters to me."

Thus it was that Doctor Hoyle received a letter in Betty's own impassioned and impulsive style, begging him, for love's sake, to leave all and come back to the mountains and his own little cabin, where Cassandra needed him.

"Never mind Doctor Thryng or anything surprising about his being absent; just come if you possibly can and hear what Cassandra has to say about it before you judge him. She is quaint and queer and wholly lovely. If you can bring little Hoyle with you, do so, for I fear his mother is grieving to see him. She wrote me a most peculiar and pathetic letter, saying her daughter was so silent about her affairs that she herself 'war nigh about dead fer worryin', and would I please come and see could I make Cass talk a leetle,' so you may be sure there is need of you. The winter is glorious in the mountains this year. Your appearance will set everything right at the Fall Place, and Cassandra will be safe."

Old Time, the unfailing, who always marches apace, bringing with him changes for good or evil, brought the dear old doctor back to the Fall Place — brought the small Adam Hoyle, with his queer little twisted neck and hunched back, drawn by harness and plaster into a much improved condition, although not straight yet — brought many letters from David filled with postponements and regrets therefor — and brought also a little son for Cassandra to hold to her bosom and dream and pray over.

And the dreams and the prayers travelled far — far, to the sunny-haired Englishman wrapped in the intricate affairs of a great estate. How much money would accrue? How should it be spent? What improvements should be made in their country home? When Laura's coming out should be? How many of her old companions might she retain? How many might she call friends? How

many were to be hereafter thrust out as quite impossible? Should she be allowed a kennel, or should her sporting tendencies be discouraged?

All these things were forced upon David's consideration; how then could he return to his young wife, especially when he could not yet bring himself to say to his world that he had a young wife. Impatient he might be, nervous, and even irritable, but still what could he do? While there in the far-away hills sat Cassandra, loving him, brooding over him with serene and peaceful longing, holding his baby to her white breast, holding his baby's hand to her lips, full of courage, strong in her faith, patient in spirit, until as days and weeks passed she grew well and strong in body.

Being sadly in need of rest, the old doctor lingered on in the mountains until spring was well advanced. Slight of body, but vigorous and wiry, and as full of scientific enthusiasm as when he was thirty years younger, he tramped the hills, taking long walks and climbs alone, or shorter ones with Hoyle at his heels like a devoted dog, shrilling questions as he ran to keep up. These the good doctor answered according to his own code, or passed over as beyond possibility of reply with quizzical counter-questioning.

They sat together one day, eating their luncheon in the shelter of a great wall of rock, and below them lay a pool of clear water which trickled from a spring higher up. Now and then a bullfrog would sound his deep bass note, and all the time the high piping of the peepers made shrill accompaniment to their voices as they conversed.

The doctor had made an aquarium for Hoyle, using a great glass jar which he obtained from a druggist in Farington. They had come to-day on a quest for snails to eat the green growth, which had so covered the sides of the jar as to hide the interesting water world within from the boy's eyes. Many things had already occurred in that small world to set the boy thinking.

"Doctah Hoyle, you remembeh that thar quare bunch of leetle sticks an' stones you put in my 'quar'um first day you fixed hit up fer me?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, the' is a right quare thing with a big hade come

outen hit, an' he done eat up some o' the leetle black bugs. I seed him jump quicker'n lightnin' at that leetlist fish only so long, an' try to bite a piece outen his fin — his lowest fin. What did he do that fer?"

"Why — why — he was hungry. He made his dinner off the little black bugs, and he wanted the fin for his dessert."

"I don't like that kind of a beast. Oncet he was a worm in a kind of a hole-box, an' then he turned into a leetle beast-crittah; an' what'll he be next?"

"Next — why, next he'll be a fly — a — a beautiful fly with four wings all blue and gold and green —"

"I seen them things flyin' round in the summeh. Hit's quare how things gits therselves changed that-a-way into somethin' else — from a worm into that beast-crittah an' then into one o' these here devil flies. You reckon hit'll eveh git changed into something diff'ent — some kind er a bird?"

"A bird? No, no. When he becomes a f — fly, he's finished and done for."

"P'r'aps ther is some folks that-a-way, too. You reckon that's what ails me?"

"You? Why, — why what ails you?"

"You reckon p'r'aps I mount git changed some way outen this here quare back I got, so't I can hol' my hade like otheh folks? Jes' go to sleep like, an' wake up straight like Frale?"

The old doctor turned and looked down a moment on the child sitting hunched at his side. His mouth worked as he meditated a reply.

"What would you do if you could c—arry your head straight like Frale? If you had been like him, you would be running a 'still' pretty soon. You never would have come to me to set you straight, and so you would n—never have seen all the pictures and the great cities. You are going to be a man before you know it, and —"

"And I'll do a heap o' things when I'm a man, too — but I wisht — I wisht — These here snails we b'en hunt'n', you reckon they're done growed to ther shells so they can't get out? What did God make 'em that-a-way fer?"

"It's all in the order of things. Everything has its

place in the world and its work to do. They don't want to get out. They like to carry their bones on the outside of their bodies. They're made so. Yes, yes, all in the order of things. They like it."

"You reckon you can tell me hu' come God 'lowed me to have this-er lump on my back? Hit hain't in no ordeh o' things fer humans to be like I be."

The sceptical old man looked down on the child quizzically, yet sadly. His flexible mouth twitched to reply, but he was silent. Hoyle looked back into the old doctor's eyes with grave, direct gaze, and turned away. "You reckon why he done hit?"

"See here. Suppose — just suppose you were given your choice this minute to change places with Frale — Lord knows where he is now, or what he's doing — or be as you are and live your own life; which would you be? Think it over; think it out."

"Ef I had 'a' been straight, brother David never would 'a' took me up to you?"

"No — no — no. You would have been a —"

"You mean if a magic man should come by here an' just touch me so, an' change me into Frale, would I 'low him to do hit?"

"That's what I mean."

"I don't guess Frale, he'd like to be done that-a-way." The loving little chap nestled closer to the doctor's side. "I like you a heap, Doctah Hoyle. Frale, he fit brothah David — an' nigh about killed him. I reckon I rutheh be like I be, an' bide nigh Cass an' th' baby — an' have the 'quar'um — an' see maw — an' go with you. You reckon I can go back with you?"

"Go back? Of course — go back."

"Be I heap o' trouble to you? You reckon God 'lowed me to have this er hump, so't I could get to go an' bide whar you were at, like I done?"

A suspicious moisture gathered in the doctor's eyes, and he sprang up and went to examine earnestly a thorny shrub some paces away, while the child continued to pipe his questions, for the most part unanswerable. "You reckon God just gin my neck er twist so't brothah David would take me to Canada to you, an' so't maw'd 'low me to go? You reckon if I'm right good, He'll 'low me

to make a picture o' th' ocean some day, like the one we seed in that big house? You reckon if I tried right hard I could paint a picture o' th' mountain, yandah — an' th' sea — an' — all the — all the — ships?"

The doctor laughed heartily and merrily. "Come, come. We must go home now to Cassandra and the baby. Paint? Of — of course you could paint! You could paint p—pictures enough to fill a house."

"We don't want no magic man, do we, Doctah Hoyle? I cried a heap after I seed myself in the big lookin'-glass down in Farington whar brothah David took me. I cried when hit war dark an' maw war sleepin'. Next time I reckon I bettah tell God much obleeged fer twistin' my hade 'roun' 'stead er cryin' an' takin' on like I been doin'. You reckon so, Doctah Hoyle?"

"Yes — yes — yes. I reckon so," said the doctor, meditatively, as they descended the trail. From that day the child's strength increased. Sunny and buoyant, he shook off the thought of his deformity, and his beauty-loving soul ceased introspective brooding and found delight in searching out beauty, and in his creative faculty.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN WHICH FRALE RETURNS TO THE MOUNTAINS

Doctor Hoyle lingered until the last of the laurel bloom was gone, and the widow had become so absorbed in her grandchild as to make the parting much easier. Then he took the small Adam and departed for the North. Never did the kind old man dream that his frail and twisted little namesake would one day be the pride of his life and the comfort of his declining years.

"Hoyle sure do look a heap bettah'n when Doctah David took him off that day. Hit did seem like I'd nevah see him again. Don't you guess 'at he's beginnin' to grow some? Seems like he do."

The widow was seated on her little porch with the doctor, the evening before they left, and Cassandra, who, since the birth of the heir, had been living again in her own little cabin, had brought the baby down. He lay on his grandmother's lap quietly sleeping, while his mother gathered Hoyle's treasures, and packed his diminutive trunk. The boy followed her, chattering happily as she worked. She also had noticed the change in him, and suggested that perhaps, as he had gained such a start toward health, he need not return, but would do quite well at home.

"He's a care to you, Doctor, although you're that kind and patient, — I don't see how ever we can thank you enough for all you've done!" Then Hoyle, to their utter astonishment, threw himself on the ground at the doctor's feet and burst into bitter weeping.

"Why, son, are ye cryin' that-a-way so's you can get to go off an' leave maw here 'lone?" But he continued to weep, and at last explained to them that the "Lord done crooked him up that-a-way so't he could git to go an' learn to be a painter an' make a house full of pictures," and that

the doctor had said he might. Doctor Hoyle lifted him to his knees with many assurances that he would keep his word, but for a long time the child sobbed hysterically, his face pressed against the old man's sleeve.

"What's that you sayin', child, 'bouts the Lord twistin' yer neck? Bettah lay sech as that to the devil, more'n likely."

At the mention of that sinister individual, the babe wakened and stretched out his plump, bare arms, with little pink fists tightly closed. He yawned a prodigious yawn for so small a countenance, and gazed vacantly in his grandmother's face. Then a look of intelligence crept into his eyes, and he smiled one of those sweet, evanescent smiles of infancy.

"Look at him now, laughin' at me that-a-way. He be the peartest I eveh did see. Cass, she sure be mean not to tell his fathah 'at he have a son, she sure be."

Cassandra came and tenderly took the babe in her arms and held him to her breast. "There, there. Sleep, honey son, sleep again," she cooed, swaying her body to the rhythm of her speech. "Sleep, honey son, sleep again."

"Don't you reckon she be mean to Doctah David, nevah to let on 'at he have a son, and he a-growin' that fast? You a-doin' his fathah mean, Cassandry." Still Cassandra swayed and sang.

"Sleep, honey son, sleep again."

"He nevah will forgive you when he finds out how you have done him. I can't make out what-all ails ye, nohow."

"Hush, mother. I'm just leaving his heart in peace. He'll come when he can, and then he'll forgive me."

As the doctor walked slowly at her side that evening, carrying the sleeping child back to her cabin, he also ventured a remonstrance, but without avail.

"It's hardly fair to his father—such a fine little chap. You—you have a monopoly of him this way, you know."

She flushed at the implication of selfishness, but said nothing.

"How—how is that? Don't you think so?" he persisted kindly.

"I reckon you can't feel what I feel, Doctor. Why should I make his heart troubled when he must stay there?

David knows I hate it to bide so long without him. He — he knows. If he could get to come back, don't you guess he'd come right quick, anyway? Would he come any sooner for his son than for me?" It was the doctor's turn for silence. She asked again, this time with a tremor in her voice. "You reckon he would, Doctor?"

"No! Of — of course not," he cried.

"Then what would be the use of telling him, only to trouble him?"

"He — he might like to think about him — you know — might like it."

"He said he must go to Africa in May, so now he must have started — and our wedding was on May-day. Now it's the last of May; he must be there. He might be obliged to bide in that country a whole month — maybe two. It's so far away, and his letters take so long to come! Doctor, are they fighting there now? Sometimes I wake in the night and think what if he should die away off there in that far place —"

"No, no. That's done. Not fighting, thank God. Rest your heart in peace. Now, after I'm gone, don't stay up here alone too much. I'm a physician, and I know what's best for you."

She took the now soundly sleeping child from the doctor's arms and laid him on the bed in the canvas room. The day had been warm, and the fire was out in the great fireplace; the evening wind, light and cool, laden with sweet odors, swept through the cabin.

They talked late that night of Hoyle and his future, but never a word more of David. The old man thought he now understood her feeling, and respected it. She certainly had a right to one small weakness, this strong fair creature of the hills. Her husband must release himself from his absorbing cares and return simply for love of her — not at the call of his baby's wail.

So the doctor and his diminutive namesake drove contentedly away next morning in the great covered wagon, and Cassandra, standing by her mother's door, smiled and lifted her baby for one last embrace from his loving little uncle.

"I'm goin' to grow a big man, an' I'll teach him to make pictures — big ones," he called back.

"Yas, you'll do a heap. You bettah watch out to be right good and peart; that's what you bettah do."

David, not unmindful of affairs on the far-away mountain side, made it quite worth the while of the two cousins to stay on with the widow and run the small farm under Cassandra's directions, and she found herself fully occupied. She wrote David all the details: when and where things were planted — how the vines he had set on the hill slope were growing — how the pink rose he had brought from Hoke Belew's and planted by their threshold had grown to the top of the door, and had three sweet blossoms. She had shaken the petals of one between the pages of her letter on May-day, and sent it to remind him, she said.

Nearly a month later than he had intended to sail, David left England, overwhelmed with many small matters which seemed so great to his mother and sister, and burdened with duties imposed upon him by the realization that he had come into the possession of enormous wealth, more than he could comprehendingly estimate; and that he was now setting out to secure and prevent the loss of possibly double what he already possessed.

People gathered about him and presented him with worthy and unworthy opportunities for its disposal. They flocked to him in herds, with importunities and flatteries. The tower which he had built up with his ideals, and in which he had intrenched himself, was in danger of being undermined and toppled into ruins, burying his soul beneath the débris. When seated on the deck, the rose petals dropped into his hand as he tore open Cassandra's letter. Some, ere he could catch them, were caught up and blown away into the sea.

He held them and inhaled their sweetness, and everything seemed to find its true value and proportion and to fall into its right place. Again on the mountain top, with Cassandra at his side, he viewed in a perspective of varying gradations his life, his aims, and his possessions.

The personality of his young wife, of late a vague thing to him, distant and fair, and haloed about with sweet memories dimly discerned like a dream that is past, presented itself to him all at once vivid and clear, as if he held her in his arms with her head on his breast.

He heard again her voice with its quaint inflections and lingering tones. Their love for each other loomed large, and became for him at once the one truly vital thing in all his share of the universe. Had his body been endowed with the wings of his soul, he would have left all and gone to her; but, alas for the restrictions of matter! he was gliding rapidly away and away, farther from the immediate attainment. Yet was his tower strengthened wherein he had intrenched himself with his ideals. The withered rose petals had brought him exaltation of purpose.

In the mountains, July came with unusually sultry heat, yet the rich pocket of soil, watered by its never failing stream, suffered little from the drought. Weeds grew apace, and Cassandra had much ado to hold her cousin Cotton Caswell, easy-going and thriftless, to his task of keeping the small farm in order.

For a long time now, Cassandra had avoided those moments of far-seeing and brooding. Had not David said he feared them for her? In these days of waiting, she dreaded lest they show her something to which she would rather remain blind. In the evenings, looking over the hilltops from her rock, visions came to her out of the changing mists, but she put them from her and calmed her breast with the babe on her bosom, and solaced her longing by keeping all in readiness for David's return. Perhaps at any moment, with wind-lifted hair and buoyant smile, he might come up the laurel path.

For this reason she preferred living in her own cabin home, and, that she might not be alone at night, Martha Caswell or her brother slept on a cot in the large cabin room, but Cassandra cared little for their company. They might come or not as they chose. She was never afraid now that she was strong again and baby was well.

One evening sitting thus, her babe lying asleep on her knees and her heart over the sea, something caused her to start from her revery and look away from the blue distance, toward the cabin. There, a few paces away, regarding her intently, stalwart and dark, handsome and eager, stood Frale. Much older he seemed, more reckless he appeared, yet still a youth in his undisciplined impulse. She sat pale as death, unable to move, in breathless amazement.

He smiled upon her out of the gathering dusk. For some minutes he had been regarding her, and the tumult within him had become riotous with long restraint. He came swiftly forward and, ere she could turn her head, his arms were about her, and his lips upon hers, and she felt herself pinioned in her chair — nor, for guarding her baby unhurt by his vehemence, could she use her hands to hold him from her; nor for the suffocating beating of her heart could she cry out; neither would her cry have availed, for there were none near to hear her.

"Stop, Frale! I am not yours; stop, Frale," she implored.

"Yas, you are mine," he said, in his low drawl, lifting his head to gaze in her face. "You gin me your promise. That doctah man, he done gone an' lef' you all alone, and he ain't nevah goin' to come back to these here mountins."

She snatched her hands from the child on her knees, and, with sudden movement, pushed him violently; but he only held her closer, and it was as if she struggled against muscles of iron.

"Naw, you don't! I have you now, an' I won't nevah leave you go again." He had not been drinking, yet he was like one drunken, so long had he brooded and waited.

Rapidly she tried to think how she might gain control over him, when, wakened by the struggle, the babe wailed out and he started to his feet, his hands clutching into his hair as if he were struck with sudden fear. He had not noticed or given heed to what lay upon her knees, and the cry penetrated his heart like a knife.

A child! His child — that doctor's child? He hated the thought of it, and the old impulse to strike down anything or any creature that stood in his way seized him — the impulse that, unchecked, had made him a murderer. He could kill, kill! Cassandra gathered the little body to her heart and, standing still before him, looked into his eyes. Instinctively she knew that only calmness and faith in his right action would give her the mastery now, and with a prayer in her heart she spoke quietly.

"How came you here, Frale? You wrote mother you'd gone to Texas." His figure relaxed, and his arms dropped, but still he bent forward and gazed eagerly into her eyes.

"I come back when I heered he war gone. I come back right soon. Cate Irwin's wife writ me 'at he war gone; an' now she done tol' me he ain't nevah goin' to come back to these here mountins. Ev'ybody on the mountins knows that. He jes' have fooled you-all that-a-way, makin' out to marry you whilst he war in bed, like he coulda' stand on his feet, an' then gittin' up an' goin' off this-a-way, an' bidin' nigh on to a year. We don't 'low our women to be done that-a-way, like they war pore white trash. I come back fer you like I promised, an' you done gin me your promise, too. I reckon you won't go back on that now." He stepped nearer, and she clasped the babe closer, but did not flinch.

"Yes, Frale, you promised, and I — I — promised — to save you from yourself — to be a good man; but you broke yours. You didn't repent, and you went on drinking, and — then you tried to kill an innocent man when he was alone and unarmed; like a coward you shot him. I called back my words from God; I gave them to the man I loved — promise for promise, Frale."

"Yas, and curse for curse. You cursed me, Cass." He made one more step forward, but she stood her ground and lifted one hand above her head, the gesture he so well remembered.

"Keep back, Frale. I did not curse you. I let you go free, and no one followed you. Go back — farther — farther — or I will do it now — Oh, God —" He cowered, his arm before his eyes, and moved backward.

"Don't, Cass," he cried. For a moment she stood regally before him, her babe resting easily in the hollow of her arm. Then she slowly lowered her hand and spoke again, in quiet, distinct tones.

"Now, for that lie they have told you, I am going to my husband. I start to-morrow. He has sent me money to come to him. You tell that word all up and down the mountain side, wherever there bides one to hear."

She lifted her baby, pressing his little face to her cheek, and turning, walked slowly toward her cabin door.

"Cass," he called.

She paused. "Well, Frale?"

"Cass, you hev cursed me."

"No, Frale, it is the curse of Cain that rests on your

soul. You brought it on you by your own hand. If you will live right and repent, Christ will take it off."

"Will you ask him for me, Cass? I sure hev lost you now — forever, Cass!"

"Yes, Frale. I'll ask him to cover up all this year out of your life. It has been full of mad badness. Be like you used to be, Frale, and leave off thinking on me this way. It is sin. Go marry somebody who can love you and care for you like you need, and come back here and do for mother like you used to. Giles Teasley can't pester you. He's half dead with his badness — drinking his own liquor."

She came to him, and, taking his hand, led him toward the laurel path. "Go down to mother now, Frale, and have supper and sleep in your own bed, like no evil had ever come into your heart," she pleaded. "The good is in you, Frale. God sees it, and I see it. Heed to me, Frale. Good-night."

Slowly, with bent head, he walked away.

Trembling, Cassandra laid her baby in the cradle Hoke Belew had made her, and, kneeling beside the rude little bed, she bowed her head over it and wept scalding, bitter tears. She felt herself shamed before the whole mountain side. Oh, why — why need David have left her so long — so long! The first reproach against him entered her heart, and at the same time she reasoned with herself.

He could not help it — surely he could not. He was good and true, and they should all know it if she had to lie for it. When she had sobbed herself into a measure of calmness, she heard a step cross the cabin floor. Quickly drying her tears, she rose and stood in the doorway of the canvas room, with dilated eyes and indrawn breath, peering into the dusk, barring the way. It was only her mother.

"Why, mothah!" she cried, relieved and overjoyed.

"Have you seen Frale?"

"Yes, mothah. He was here. Sit down and get your breath. You have climbed too fast."

Her mother dropped into a chair and placed a small bundle on the table at her side.

"What-all is this Frale say you have told him? Have David writ fer you like Frale say? What-all have Frale

been up to now? He come down creepin' like he a half-dade man — that soft an' quiet."

"I'm going to David, mother. You know he sent me money to use any way I choose, and I'm going." She caught her breath and faltered.

The mother rose and took her in her arms, and, drawing her head down to her wrinkled cheek, patted her softly.

"Thar, honey, thar. I reckon your ol' maw knows a heap more'n you think. You keep mighty still, but you can't fool her."

Cassandra drew herself together. "Why didn't Martha come up this evening?"

"She war makin' ready, in her triflin' slow way, an' then Frale come down an' said that word, an' I knew right quick 'at ther war somethin' behind — his way war that quare — so I told Marthy to set him out a good suppah, an' I'd stop up here myself this night. She war right glad to do hit. Fool, she be! I could see how she went plumb silly ovah Frale all to onc't."

"Mothah, you know right well what they're saying about David and me. Is it true, that word Frale said, that everyone says he nevah will come back?" The mother was silent. "That's all right, mothah. We'll pack up to-night, and I'll go down to Farington to-morrow. Mrs. Towahs will help me to start right."

She lighted candles and began to lay out her baby's wardrobe. "I haven't anything to put these in, but I can carry everything I need down there in baskets, and she will help me. They've always been that good to me — all my life."

"Cass, Cass, don't go," wailed her mother. "I'm afraid somethin'll happen you if you go that far away. If you could leave baby with me, Cass! Give hit up. Be ye 'feared o' Frale, honey?"

"No, mother, the man doesn't live that I'm afraid of." She paused, holding the candle in her hand, lighting her face that shone whitely out of the darkness. Her eyes glowed, and she held her head high. Then she turned again to her work, gathering her few small treasures and placing them on one of the highest shelves of the chimney cupboard. As she worked, she tried to say comforting things to her mother.

"I'll write to you every day, like David does me, mother. See? I've kept all his letters. They're in this box. I don't want to burn them because I love them; and I don't want any one else to read them; and I don't want to carry them with me because I'll have him there. Will you lock them in your box, mother, and if anything happens to me, will you sure — sure burn them?" She laid them on the table at her mother's elbow. "You promise, mothah?"

"Yas, Cass, yas."

"What's in that bundle, mothah?"

With trembling fingers the widow opened her parcel and displayed the silver teapot, from which the spout had been melted to be moulded into silver bullets.

"Thar," she said, holding it out by the handle, "hit's yourn. Farwell, he done that one day whilst I war gone, an' the last bullet war the one Frale used when he nigh killed your man. No, I reckon you nevah did see hit before, fer I've kept hit hid good. I knowed ther were somethin' to come outen hit some day. Hit do show your fathah come from some fine high fambly somewhar. I done showed hit to Doctah David, fer I 'lowed he mount know was hit wuth anything, but he seemed to set more by them two leetle books. He has them books yet, I reckon."

"Yes, he has them."

"When Frale told me you war a-goin' to David, I guessed 'at thar war somethin' 'at I'd ought to know, an' I clum up here right quick, fer if he war a-lyin', I meant to find out the reason why." She looked keenly in her daughter's face, which remained passive under the scrutiny.

"Has Frale been a-pesterin' you?"

"He did — some — at first; but I sent him away."

"I reckoned so. Now heark. You tell me straight, did David send fer ye, er didn't he?"

In silence Cassandra turned to her work, until it seemed as if the room were filled with the suspense of the unanswered question. Then she tried evasion.

"Why do you ask in that way, mothah?"

"Because if he sont fer ye, I'll help ye all I can; but if he didn't, I'll hinder ye, and ye'll bide right whar ye be."

"You won't do that, mothah."

"I sure will. If David haven't sont fer ye, an' ye go, ye'll have to walk ovah me to get thar, hear?"

The mother's voice was raised to a higher pitch than was her wont, and the little silver pot shook in her hand. Cassandra took it and regarded it without interest, absorbed in other thoughts. Then, throwing off her abstraction, she began questioning her mother about it, and why she had brought it to her now. The widow told all she knew, as she had told David, and pointed out the half obliterated coat of arms on the side.

"I've heered your paw say 'at ther war more pieces'n this, oncet, but this'n come straight to him from his grandpaw, an' now hit's yourn. If he have sont fer ye, take hit with ye. Hit may be wuth more'n you think fer now. I been told they do think a heap o' fambly ovah thar, jest like we do here in the mountins. Leastways, hit's all we do have — some of us. My fambly war all good stock, capable and peart; an' now heark to me. Wharevah you go, just you hold your hade up. The' hain't nothin' more despisable than a body 'at goes meachin' around like some old sheep-stealin' houn' dog. Now if he sure 'nough have sont fer ye, go, an' I'll help ye, but if he haven't, bide whar ye be."

Cassandra drew in her breath sharply, no longer able to evade the question, with her mother's keen eyes searching her face. All her reasons for going flashed through her mind in a moment's space of time. The book she had been reading — what were English people really like? And David — her David — her boy's father — what shameful things were they saying of him all over the mountain that Frale should dare come to her as he had done? She could not stay now; she would not. Her cheeks flamed, and she walked silently into the canvas room and stood by her baby's cradle. Her mother began wrapping up the silver pot.

"I guess I'll take this back an' lock hit up again. You sure hain't to go if ye can't give me that word."

Cassandra went quickly and took it from her mother's hand. "No, mother, give it to me. I told Frale David had sent for me, and I'm going."

"And he have sont fer ye?"

"Yes, mothah." Her reply was low as she turned again to her work.

"Waal, now, why couldn't you have give me that word first off? Hit's his right to have ye, an' I'll he'p ye. You'd ought to go to him if he can't come to you."

Instantly up and alert, putting bravely aside her own feelings at the thought of parting, the mother began helping her daughter; but long after they were finished and settled for the night, she lay wakeful and dreading the coming day.

Cassandra slept less, and lay quietly thinking, sorrowful that she must leave her home, and not a little anxious over what might be her future and what might be her fate in that strange land.

When at last she slept, she dreamed of the people she had met in *Vanity Fair*, with David strangely mixed up among them, and Frale ever alert and watchful, moving wherever she moved, silently lingering near and never taking his eyes from her face.

In the morning, mother and daughter were up betimes, but no word was spoken between them to betoken hesitation or fear. Cassandra walked in a sort of dumb wonder at herself, and smouldering deep beneath the surface was a fierce resentment against those who, having known her from childhood, and receiving many favors and kindnesses from her, should now presume to so speak against her husband as to make Frale dare to approach her as he had. Oh, the burning shame of those kisses! The shame of the thought against David that pervaded her beloved mountains! For the sake of his good name, she would put away her pride and go to him.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN WHICH CASSANDRA VISITS DAVID THRYNG'S ANCESTORS

It was a pleasant morning in London, with as clear a sky as is ever permitted to that great city. Cassandra had placed her little son in the middle of a huge bed which nearly filled the small room she had been given in a hotel, recommended to her by Betty Towers as one where "nice ladies travelling alone" could stop.

The child was dressed in a fresh white coat, and Cassandra had much ado to keep him clean. She heaped him about with pillows and bedclothing to make a nest for him, and gave him a spoon and a drinking cup for entertainment, while she arranged her own toilet before a cloudy mirror by a slant ray of daylight that managed to sift through the heavy draperies and lace curtains that obscured the one high, narrow window of her room.

She had tried to put them one side that she might look out when she awoke, but she could see only chimney-pots and grimy, irregularly tiled roofs. A narrow opening at the top of the window let in a little air; still she felt smothered, and tried to raise the lower sash, but could not move it. She thought of the books she had read about great cities, and how some people had to live in places like this always; and her heart filled with a large pity for them. Here only a small triangle of blue sky could be seen — not a tree, not a bit of earth — and in the small room all those heavy furnishings closed around her, dark red, stuffy, and greasy with London smoke. She could not touch them without blackening her hands, nor let her baby sit on the floor for the dirt he wiped up on his clothing as he rolled and kicked about.

The room seemed to sway and tip as the ship had done, and there was a continuous sound as of thunder, a strange undercurrent that seemed to her strained nerves like the

moaning of the lost souls of all the ages, who had lived and toiled and smothered in this monstrous and terrible city.

Ah, she must get out of it. She must hurry — hurry and find David. He would be glad to see his little son. He would take him in his arms. He would hold them both to his heart. She would see him smile again and look in his eyes, and all this foreboding would cease, and the woful sounds die out of the air and become only the natural roar of the activities and traffic of a great city. She must get used to all this, and not expect to find all the world like her own sunny mountains.

The bishop's careful little wife had tried to explain to her how to meet her new experiences. She was to go nowhere alone, without taking a cab, and never start out on foot, carrying her baby in her arms, as she might do at home. She had given her written instructions how to conduct herself under all ordinary circumstances, at her hotel or on the street — how to ring for a servant, order her meals, or call a cab.

Now, standing before her mirror, Cassandra essayed to arrange her hair as she had seen other young women wear theirs, but she thought the new way looked untidy, and she took it all down and rearranged it as she was used to wear it. David would not mind if she did not do her hair as others did, he would be so glad to see her and his little son. Ah, the comfort of that little son! She leaned over the bed, half dressed as she was, and murmured pretty cooing phrases, kissing and cuddling him to contented laughter.

Betty Towers had procured clothing for her — a modest supply — using her own good taste, and not disguising Cassandra's natural grace and dignity by a too-close adherence to the prevailing mode. There were a blue travelling gown and jacket, and a toque of the same color with a white wing; a soft clinging black silk, made with girlish simplicity which admirably became her, and a wide, flexible brimmed hat with a single heavy plume taken from Betty's own hat of the last winter. Cassandra stood a long moment before the two gowns. She desired to don the silk, but Betty had told her always to wear the blue in the morning, so at last she obeyed her kind adviser.

While waiting with her baby in her arms for the hotel boy to call her cab, she observed another lady, young and

graceful, enter a cab, and a maid following her wearing a pretty cap, and carrying a child. Eager, for David's sake, to draw no adverse comment upon herself, she took note of everything. Ought she then to arrive attended by a maid, carrying her baby? But David would know she did not need one; bringing him his little son in her own arms, what would he care for anything more? So the address was given the cabman, and they were rattled away over the rough paving, a long, lonely ride through the wonderful city — so many miles of houses and splendid buildings, of gardens and monuments.

Strangely, the people of *Vanity Fair* leaped out of the book she had read, and walked the streets or dashed by her in cabs — albeit in modern dress. The soldiers — the guardsmen — the liveried lackeys — the errand boys — all were there, and the ladies in fine carriages. There were the nursemaids — the babies — the beggars — the ragged urchins and the venders of the street, with their raucous cries rending the air. Her brain whirled, and a new feeling to which she had hitherto been blessedly a stranger crept over her, a feeling of fear.

As the great two-story coaches and trams thundered by, she clasped her baby closer, until he looked up in her face with round-eyed wonder and put up his lip in pitiful protest. She soothed and comforted him until her panic passed, and when, at last, they stopped before a great house built in on either side by other houses, with wide steps of stone descending directly upon the street, she had regained a measure of composure. She was assured by the cabman, leaning respectfully down to her with his cap in his hand, that this was "the 'ouse, ma'm," and should he wait?

"Oh, yes. Wait," cried Cassandra. What if David were not there! And of course, he might be out. Then they were swallowed up in the dark interior. She was admitted to a hall that seemed to her empty and vast, by a little old man in livery. For a moment, bewildered, she could hardly understand what he was saying to her. "'Er ladyship's at 'er country 'ome and the 'ouse closed."

Although dazed and baffled, Cassandra betrayed no sign of the tumult within, and the little old man stood before her hesitating, his curiosity piqued into a determi-

nation to discover her business and identity. Her gravity and silence gave her a poise and dignity that allayed suspicion, but he and his old wife liked diversion, and a spice of gossip lightened the monotony of their lives, so he waited, then coughed behind his hand.

"Yes, 'er ladyship and Lady Laura are at their country 'ome now, ma'm. Maybe you came to see the 'ouse, ma'm?"

"No, it was not the house — it was —" Again she waited, not knowing how to introduce her husband's name.

A mystery! A visitor at this hour, and seemingly a lady, yet with a baby in her arms, and alone, and not to see the house. Again he coughed behind his hand.

"A many do come to see the 'ouse, ma'm, with a permit from 'is lordship, ma'm. 'E's not 'ere now, but strangers are halways welcome — to the gallery, ma'm."

"Yes, I'm a stranger." She caught at the word. Seized by an inward terror of the small eyes fixed curiously on her, she intuitively shrank from betraying her identity, and the old servant had told her what she needed to know. Of course her husband was "his lordship," over here. "I am from America, and I would like to see the gallery." She must do so to give a pretext for having come to visit an empty house. David must not be compromised before the old servant, but a great lump filled her throat, and tears were burning unshed beneath her eyes.

For all of the warm August sun shining without, a chill struck to her bones as they passed through the vast, closed rooms. She held her now sleeping baby close to her breast as she followed the old man about from picture to picture.

"Yes, a many do come 'ere — especially hartists — to see this gallery. They say as 'ow 'is lordship wouldn't take a thousand pounds for this one, ma'm. We'll let in a little more light. A Vandyke — and worth it's weight in gold."

Cassandra watched him cross the floor, his short bow legs reflected grotesquely in its shining surface as he walked, then turned and gazed again at the life-size, half-length portrait of a young man with sunny hair like David's and warm brown eyes.

"There, you see, it's more than a Vandyke to the family, ma'm, for it's a hancestor, and my wife says it's as like as two peas to 'is young lordship, who has just come into the title, ma'm. And that's strange, isn't it, for 'im to look so like, being as 'e belonged to the younger branch who 'aven't 'eld the title for four generations; but come to dress 'im in velvet and gold lace, and the likeness would be nigh as perfect as if 'e 'ad stood for it."

Cassandra gazed so long silently at this picture that again the little man coughed his deprecatory cough and essayed to lead her on; but she was seeing visions and did not heed him. When at last she turned, her gray eyes had deepened, and a clearly defined spot of delicate red burned on one pale cheek. She drew a deep breath and looked down the length of the long gallery. Everything was being impressed upon her mind as upon sensitized paper.

She followed slowly in the old man's wake, never opening her lips until they had made the circuit and were again standing before the portrait of the fair-haired youth. Then, roused suddenly by a direct question, she responded.

The old servant was saying: "You 'aven't 'appened to meet a Samuel Cutter in America, 'ave you? 'E's our son. England was too slow for 'im. Young men aren't like old ones; they wants hadventure, and they gets it. That's 'ow so many of 'em joins the harmy and gets killed like 'is lordship's two sons, and young Lord Thryng's brother as would 'ave been 'is lordship, if 'e' ad lived. You 'aven't 'appened to know a Samuel Cutter over there? 'E went to Canada."

"No, I never met any one by that name. I live a long way from Canada."

"About 'ow far do you think, ma'm?"

Cassandra had no idea of the distance, but she knew how long David and Hoyle were journeying there, so she answered as best she could. "It takes three or four days to get there from my home."

The old man's eyes opened wide, and his jaw dropped. "It's a big country — America is. England may be a small place, but she 'as tremendous big possessions." He felt it all belonged to England, and spoke with swelling pride as his short legs carried him toward the door. There again he paused. He had learned nothing of this young

woman to tell his old wife, except that she came from America, and had never met Samuel Cutter. The mystery was still unsolved.

"Yes, 'is young lordship do look amazing like that picture. If you'd ever seen 'im, you'd think 'e'd dressed up in velvet and lace and stood for it. 'E's lived in America five years, but if you never were in Canada and never met our Sammy, it's more likely you never saw 'im either."

"Is he at their country home also?" Cassandra asked. She had seated herself in the hall, for her heart throbbed chokingly, and the lump was heavy in her throat. It was as she had dreamed sometimes, when her feet seemed to cling to the earth, and would not lift her weight up some steep hill.

"'Is lordship is still in Hafrica, mam. 'E 'ave been a great traveller, but 'e can't stay much longer now, for Lady Laura is to 'ave a grand coming out, and 'is lordship is to be married. Her ladyship's 'eart is set on it, and on 'is marrying 'igh, too. That's gossip, you know."

Cassandra rose and stood suddenly poised for flight. She must get out of that house and hear no more. She had a silver shilling in her hand, for Betty Towers had told her all servants expected a tip, and this was intended for the cabman. Had she followed her impulse, she would have darted by with her fingers in her ears, but instead, she dropped the shilling in the old man's hand, and quietly turned toward the door.

"Thank you," his fingers closed over the shilling. Her pallor struck him then, even as the red spot on her cheek deepened, and he held out his arms for the child.

"Let me carry 'im for you, ma'm. Is it a boy?"

But her arms closed tighter about her baby. "He is my little son." It was almost a cry, as she said it, but again she forced herself to calmness, and, walking slowly out, added, with a quiet smile: "I always keep him myself. We do in America."

In a moment she was gone. The warm sunlight burst in on them and flooded the cold hall as the old man stood in the doorway looking after the retreating cab, and down at the silver shilling.

Darker, dingier, stuffier, seemed the box of a room, as she walked into it and laid her still sleeping babe on the

bed. She felt herself moving in an unreal world. David — her David — she had not come to him after all; she had come to an empty place. She knelt and threw her arms about her little son, encircling his head and his feet. She neither wept nor prayed; and the red spot burned against the creamy whiteness of her skin. She was not thinking, only looking, seeing into the past and down the long vista of her future.

Pictures came to her — pictures of her girlhood — her dim aspirations — her melancholy-eyed father — his hilltop — and beloved, sunlit mountains. In the radiance of the spring, she saw them, and in the glory of the autumn; she breathed the fragrance of the pines in winter and heard the soft patter of summer rains on widespreading leaves. She saw David walking at her side, and heard his laugh, sun-bright and glorious he seemed, her Phœbus Apollo — the father of her little son.

She saw the terrible sea which she had crossed to come to him — the white-crested waves, with turquoise lights and indigo depths, shifting and sliding unceasingly where all the world seemed swallowed in space, and the huge steamship so small a thing in the vast and perilous deep; and now — now she was here. What was she? What was life?

She had tried to find him, her David, and had been shown the dead, and the glory of the dead — all past and gone — her David's glory. Shown that long, empty gallery resounding with those aged footsteps, and the pictures — pictures — pictures — of men and women who had once been babes like her little son and David's, now dead and gone — not one soul among them all to greet her. Proud lords and dames in frames of gold; young men and maidens in costly silks and velvets of marvellous dyes, red-cheeked, red-lipped, and soullessly silent; and she, alone and undefended in their midst, holding in her arms their last descendant. All those painted fingers seemed lifted to point at her; those silent red lips parted to cry out at her, "Look at this stranger claiming to be one of us; send her away."

And David — her David — was one of these! What they had felt — what they had thought and striven for — was it all intensified and concentrated in him? Oh, if

her soul could only reach to him, wherever he was, and penetrate this impalpable veil that stretched between them! If her hands could only touch him, her eyes look into his and see what lay in their depths for her!

Then her babe stirred and tossed up his pretty hands, waking her from her sad, vision-seeing trance. He opened his large, clear eyes, and suddenly it seemed that her wish was granted, — that the veil was rent and she was looking into David's eyes and seeing his soul free, no longer chained by invisible links to those dead and gone beings, and their traditions. This had been all a dream — a dream.

She gathered the child in her arms and held him with his sweet, warm lips pressed to her breast and his soft little hand thrust in her bosom. David's little son — David's little son! Surely all was good and well with the world! Did not the old man say it was only gossip? Had not evil things been said of David even on her own mountain? It was the trail of the serpent of ill report. He had not confided his sacred secret to these people, and they had thought what they pleased. Surely he had told his mother about his wife. She would go to his mother and wait for his return, and there she would bring her precious gift — David's little son.

Quickly she packed her few belongings and rang for a messenger, and as she stood an instant waiting for an answer to her ring, the white-capped nurse she had noticed in the morning passed by with the baby in her arms. Yes, surely women of David's state did not travel about alone. Had she not read in *Vanity Fair* how Becky Sharp always had her maid? And now she was in "Vanity Fair," and must be wise and not go to David's mother unattended. Then, too, if only she had some one with her to whom she could speak now and then, it would be better. Therefore, without further consideration, she walked swiftly down the corridor after the tidy nurse.

"Will you tell me, please, have you a sister?" she said. The young woman stood still in astonishment. "Or — any friend like yourself? I — I am a stranger from America." The look of surprise changed to one of curiosity. "And it is right hard to go about alone with my baby, so I thought I would ask you if you have a sister."

"Is it to the country you wish to go, ma'm?" The baby in her arms stirred, and the nurse swayed gently back and forth to hush it.

"Yes."

"I couldn't go with you myself, ma'm — but —"

"Oh, no! I didn't mean you. I only thought if you had a sister — or a friend, maybe, who could help me for a little while."

"I saw you this morning, ma'm, as you went out. I'll see what I can do. What number is your room? and what name? I mustn't talk here. Mrs. Darling is very particular."

"Oh, never mind, then." Cassandra turned away in sudden shame lest she had not done the right thing. The nurse watched her return to her room as swiftly as she had left it, and took note of the number.

"How very odd!" said the young woman to herself.

Cassandra felt more abashed under the round-eyed gaze of the maid than if she had encountered the queen. Her ring for a messenger had not been answered, and she did not know how to find her husband's country-seat. She felt faint and weary, but did not think of hunger, nor that it was long past the dinner-hour, and that she had eaten nothing since her early breakfast. She only thought that she must be brave and try — try to think how to reach David's people.

Resolutely she closed her door, and dressed her baby carefully; then she arrayed herself in the soft silk gown, and the wide hat with the heavy plume, and then — could David have seen her with her courageous eyes and lifted head, and the faint color from excitement in her cheeks — he would no longer have feared to take her by the hand and lead her to his mother and say, "She is my wife, and the loveliest lady in the land."

People looked at her as she passed, and turned to look again. Down wide, carpeted stairs she went, until she came to a broad landing with recessed windows, where were round polished tables and people seated, sipping tea and eating thin bread and butter and muffins. Then Cassandra knew that she was hungry and sat herself in one of the windows apart, before a table. Presently a young man came and bent down to her as if listening. She looked up

at him in bewilderment, but at the same instant, seeing another young man similarly dressed bearing a tray of muffins and tea to a lady and gentleman near by, she said: —

"I would like tea, please."

"W'ot kind, ma'm?" She did not care what kind, nor know for what to ask, only to have something soon, so she said: —

"I will take what they have."

"Yes, ma'm. Muffins, ma'm?"

"Yes," she replied wearily, and turned to gaze out of the window. Cabs and carriages were rushing up and down the street below them. She placed her little son on the seat beside her and held him with sheltering arm, while he watched the moving vehicles and looked from them to his mother's face.

"What a perfectly lovely child!" said a pleasant voice. "Is it a boy? How old is he?"

Cassandra looked up to see a rosy-cheeked girl, a little too stout and florid, with a great mop of dark hair tied with a wide black ribbon. A gray-haired lady followed, and paused beside her.

"Yes," said Cassandra, faintly. "He is almost six months old."

The girl reached over and patted his cheek. "How perfectly dear. See him, mamma. Isn't he, though?"

"Babies are always dear," said the mother, with a smile. "Come, Laura, we can't wait, you know," and they passed on. As Cassandra looked up in the mother's face, something stirred vaguely in her heart. Had she seen her before? Possibly, so many had paused to speak to her in this casual way since she left home.

Then her tea and crisp, hot muffins were brought. The young girl's pleasant words had warmed her heart, and the refreshment gave her more courage. She made her way to the office and inquired how she might find Lord Thryng's country home. The clerk wrote the address promptly on a card, but the keen look of interest with which he handed it to her caused her to shrink inwardly. Why, what was it to him what place she asked for? She lifted her head proudly. She must not falter.

"I wish to go there. Will you tell me how, please?"

But the surprise of the clerk was quite natural, as she

had signed the hotel register the evening before with her whole name, giving no thought to it; and now he wondered what relation she might be to the family so lately come into the title, since she bore the name, yet seemed to know so little about them. He explained to her courteously — almost deferentially.

"Will you go to Daneshead Castle itself, ma'm, or stop in Queensderry?" As she had no idea what the question involved, she replied at hazard.

"I will stop in Queensderry." And her bags were brought down, and she was despatched to the right station without more delay.

CHAPTER XXX

IN WHICH CASSANDRA GOES TO QUEENSDERRY AND TAKES A DRIVE IN A PONY CARRIAGE

GLAD to be borne away from the city and out through fresh green fields and past pretty church-spired villages, alone in the compartment, Cassandra comforted herself with her baby, playing with him until he dropped to sleep, when she made a bed for him on the car seat with rugs, and, taking out her purse, began to count her remaining resources. Her bill at the hotel had appalled her. So much to pay to stay only a night! What would David say? But he had told her to use the money as she liked, and now she was here, there was nothing else to do.

Laboriously she computed the amount in English money, and, reckoned thus, her dollars and cents seemed to shrink and vanish. Still, more than half remained of what she had brought with her, and she viewed the matter calmly.

The shadows fell long over the smooth greensward as she arrived in the village of Queensderry and was driven to a small inn, the only house of entertainment in the place. She was given a pleasant room overlooking fields and orchards and bright gardens, and the sight rested her eyes, and still further calmed her troubled heart. She would rest to-night, and to-morrow all would be well.

Never had food tasted better to her than the supper served in her pretty room, — toast in a silver rack, and fresh butter, such as David loved, and curds and whey, and gingerbread, and a small jar of marmalade. She ate, seated in the window, looking out over the sweet English landscape in the warm twilight — the breeze stirring the white curtains — her little son in her lap gurgling and smiling up at her — and her heart with David, wherever he might be.

Slowly the dusk veiled all, and one star glimmered above the slender church spire. A pretty maid brought candles

and a book in which she was asked to write her name. She was the landlady's daughter and looked wholesome and bright. Cassandra glanced in her face as she set the candles down, and took up the pen mechanically.

"Mother says will you sign here, please?"

"Yes." Cassandra turned the leaves slowly and read other names and addresses — many of them. She wrote "Cassandra Merlin —" and paused; then, making a long dash, added simply, "America," and, handing back the book and pen, turned again to the window.

"Thank you. Is that all?" said the maid, lingering.

"Yes," said Cassandra again; then she laid her baby on the bed and began taking his night clothing from her bag.

"How pretty he is! Shan't I help you unpack, ma'm?"

Cassandra paused, looking dreamily before her as if scarcely comprehending, then she said: "Not to-night, thank you. Perhaps to-morrow." The maid deftly piled the supper dishes and, taking them and the book with her, departed with a pleasant "Good night, ma'm."

In spite of her calmness, Cassandra lay wakeful and patient, and when at last she did sleep, it seemed to her she stood with her husband on her father's path, looking out under overarching boughs, upon blue distances of heaped-up mountain tops, and David's flute notes, silvery sweet, were raining down upon her. She awoke to discover day was breaking, and a pealing of bells from some distant church tower was announcing the fact.

She gathered her babe to her throbbing heart and thought, to-day she was to go out and meet her husband's people. How should she go? How should she conduct herself? Should she go at once, or wait until the afternoon? Why had she not written her name fully in the travellers' book? What mysterious foreboding had caught her fingers and stayed them at her maiden name? Was she afraid? When she arose, she found herself trembling from head to foot, and called for her breakfast, before bathing and dressing her little son.

The same pretty maid brought it, and came again, while Cassandra bathed and nursed her baby, to set the room to rights.

"Shan't I unpack your box for you now, ma'm?" And, without waiting for a reply, she took out Cassandra's

clothing, pausing now and then to admire and pet the lovely boy. Her simple friendliness pleased Cassandra, who was minded to ask some of the questions which were burdening her.

"When do people make visits here, in the morning or afternoon?"

"That depends, ma'm."

"How do you mean? I'm a stranger in England, you know."

"Yes, ma'm. If they make polite visits, they go about tea time, ma'm. But if it's parish visits, or on business, or on people they know very well, they may go in the morning, ma'm."

"And when is tea time here?"

"Why, ma'm, everybody has their tea in the afternoon along four or thereabouts, and sees their friends."

"Can I get a carriage here, do you know?"

"I can get a pony carriage, ma'm. We hires it when we need it, only we must speak for it early, or it may be taken."

"Oh! Then will you please speak for it soon? I would like to have it."

"Yes, ma'm. Will you drive yourself, ma'm, or shall I ask for a boy?"

"Oh! I don't know. I can drive — but —"

"They are gentle ponies, ma'm. Any one can drive them."

"Yes, but I don't know the way."

"Yes, ma'm. Where would you like to go, ma'm?"

"To Daneshead Castle."

The bright-cheeked maid opened her round eyes wider and looked at Cassandra with new interest. "But, ma'm, — that is quite far, though the ponies are smart, too."

"How far is it?"

"It's quite a bit away from here, ma'm; you'd have to start at two or thereabouts. I could take you myself if mother would let me, and tell you all the interesting places. but" — the girl looked at her shrewdly, a quickly withdrawn glance — "that depends on how well acquainted you are there, ma'm. Maybe you'd like better to have a man drive, and just let me go along to mind the baby for you."

"Yes, I would," said Cassandra, gladly.

"Thank you. I'll run for the ponies now, ma'm."

Cassandra heard her boots clatter rapidly down the wooden stairs at the back of the house, and presently saw her dashing across the inn yard, bareheaded and with her bare arms rolled in her apron.

The girl's manner of receiving the statement that she wished to drive to the castle was not lost on Cassandra's sensitive spirit. She sat a moment, thoughtful and sad, then rose and set herself to prepare carefully for the visit. In the afternoon! Then she might wear the silk gown and lovely hat. Once more she tried to arrange her hair as she saw other young women wear theirs, and again swept its heavy masses back loosely from her brow and coiled it low as her custom was.

The landlady's daughter chattered happily as they drove. She held the baby on her knee, and he played with the blue beads she wore about her neck, while Cassandra sat with hands dropped passively in her lap, her body leaning a little forward, straight and poised as if to move more rapidly along, her red lips parted as if listening and waiting, and her eyes courteously turning toward the places and objects pointed out to her, yet neither seeing nor hearing, except vaguely.

Presently becoming aware that the chatter was about the family at Daneshead Castle, her interest suddenly awoke. About the old lord — how vast his possessions — how ancient the family — how neglected the castle had been ever since Lady Thryng's death, — everything allowed to run down, even though they were so vastly rich — how different everything was now the parsimonious old lord was dead and the new lord had come in, and there were once more ladies in the family — what a time since there had been a Lady Thryng at Daneshead — how much Lady Laura was like her cousin Lyon — how reckless she would be if her mother did not hold her with a firm hand — and so the chatter ran on.

The girl enjoyed the distinction of knowing all about the great family and enlightening this stranger from America, whose silent attention and occasional monosyllablic replies were sufficient to inspire her friendly efforts to entertain. Moreover, her curiosity concerning Cassandra and her errand, where she was evidently neither expected nor known,

was piqued and lively, and she threw out many tentative remarks to probe if possible the stranger lady's thoughts.

"Have you ever seen Lord Thryng — the new lord, I mean, ma'm?"

"Yes," said Cassandra, simply, a chill striking to her heart to hear him mentioned thus.

"He's been out here directing the repairs himself, and getting the place ready for his mother and Lady Laura; but I never saw him. They say he's perfectly stunning. Quite the lord. Is he so very handsome, do you think?"

"Yes." Cassandra looked away from the girl's searching eyes.

"They say he never has married, and that is fortunate too; for he has lived so long in America, and never expecting to come into the title, he might have married somebody his own set over here never could have received, and that would have been bad, wouldn't it?"

Cassandra turned and looked gravely at the girl. She wished to stop her, but could not think how to do it. She could not bear to hear her husband talked over in this way.

"They are tremendous swells. Lady Thryng looks high for him, and well she may, for mother says he's worthy of a princess, he's that rich and high bred, too, for all that he was only a doctor over in America. Mother says it's very fortunate he never married some common sort over there. They say Lady Thryng wants him to marry Lady Geraldine Temple's daughter. She is a great beauty, and has a pretty fortune in her own right, too. They'll be rich enough to entertain the king! And they may do it, too, some day."

Cassandra sat still and cold. She could not stop the girl now. "Lady Laura's coming out is to be next week, so his lordship must be home soon. They say it will be a very grand affair! And I am to see it all, for mother says she will have a maid, and I may go out there to serve, and I shall see all the decorations and the fine dresses. That will be fine, won't it, baby?"

She untied the blue beads and dangled them before the baby's eyes, and he caught at them and gurgled in baby glee. Cassandra sat silent, rigid, and cold, unheeding the child or the girl, only vaguely hearing the chatter.

"And that will be grand, won't it, baby? But he is a

love, this boy! There is Daneshead Castle now, ma'm. You see it through the trees, but the grounds are so large we have to drive a good bit before we are there."

The driver turned the ponies' heads, and they scampered through a high stone gateway and along a smooth road which wound through a dense wood, with green open spaces interspersed, where deer were browsing. All was very beautiful and quiet and sweet, but Cassandra, sitting with wide-open eyes, gravely beautiful, did not see it.

To the girl everything was delightful. She had not the slightest doubt that the American lady was very rich. That she travelled so simply and alone was nothing. They all did queer things — the Americans. She was obtusely unconscious that she had been speaking slightingly of them to one of themselves, and she talked on after the romantic manner of girls the world over, giving the gossip of the inn parlors as she listened to it evening after evening, where the affairs of the nobility were freely discussed and enlarged and commented upon with eager interest.

What was spoken in her ladyship's chamber and Lady Laura's boudoir — their half-formed plans and aspirations — carelessly dropped words and unfinished sentences — quickly travelled to the housekeeper's parlor — to the servant's table — to the haunts of grooms and stable boys — to the farmer's daughters — and to the public rooms of the Queensderry Inn.

Thus it was Cassandra heard tales of the brother and sister and mother of her David, and of him also. How it was said that once he was engaged to a rich tradesman's daughter but had broken it off and gone to America against the wishes of all his family, and had become a common practitioner there to the disgust of all his relatives; and again Cassandra felt that she had left a sweet and lovely world behind her to step into "Vanity Fair."

She tried to hold fast her faith in goodness and high purpose. She was sure — sure — David had been moved by noble motives; why should she not trust him now? Did this girl know him better than she — his wife? Yet, in spite of her valiant spirit, two facts fell like leaden weights upon her heart. David had not told his people that he had a wife, and they would be offended that he had "tied himself to a common sort over there." This David

whom she loved was so high above her in the eyes of all his relatives and perhaps even in his own. What — ah, what could she do! Might she still hold him in her heart? She could not walk in upon them now and betray him — never — never.

Her lips grew pale, and her head swam, but she sat still, leaning a little forward in the moving phaeton, her hands tightly clasped in her lap and her babe unheeded at her side, until the red returned to her lips and again burned in a clearly defined spot against the pallor of her cheek. She did not know that a strange, unearthly beauty was hers. A carriage met them filled with gay people. She did not notice them, but they gazed at her and turned to look again as they passed.

"I say, you know!" said one of the men, as they whirled by.

"There, that was Lady Geraldine Temple in that carriage, and the young man who stared so hard is her son. They've been paying a visit, or maybe they've brought Lady Clara to stay a bit. They say both families are keen for the match — and why shouldn't they be? Oh, they'll entertain the king here some day, and then there'll be high times at Daneshead!"

An automobile flashed by them, and then another. "There must be a party here to-day, or likely it's visitors dropping in, now it's getting toward tea time. It's all right, ma'm," she added, as Cassandra stirred uneasily. "It must be only visitors, or I would have heard of it. They're keeping open house now, though they don't go anywhere themselves yet. You see it's a year since the deaths, so they could mourn them all at once, and not spin it along. They had to wait a year before Lady Laura's coming out — rightly. Let the ponies walk now, driver. I beg pardon, ma'm." The girl had so taken possession of Cassandra, the baby, and the whole expedition, that she gave the order unthinkingly.

"Yes, let them walk," said Cassandra, and drew a long breath. She heard gay laughter, and caught sight through the trees of light dresses and wide, plumed hats. Some one sat on the terrace at a table whereon was shining silver.

"There, I said so! That's Lady Clara pouring tea.

I say, but she's a beauty! Isn't she? No, no. Go to the front, driver. American ladies don't call at the side."

"There's a hautomobile there, ma'm."

"Then wait a moment. Don't be a stupid."

Thus, aided by the innkeeper's clever daughter, Cassandra at last made her entrance properly and was guided to the presence of David's mother, who had not joined her guests, having but just closed an interview with Mr. Stretton. As she saw Cassandra standing in the drawing-room waiting her, Lady Thryng came graciously forward. The lovely August weather had tempted every one out of doors, and the great room was left empty save for these two, David's mother and his wife.

The beauty of other-worldliness which had infused Cassandra's whole being as she fought her silent battle during the long drive, still enveloped her. If she could have followed her impulses, she would have held out both hands and cried: "Take me and love me. I am David's wife." But she would not — she must not. Her heritage of faith in goodness — both of God and man — kept her heart open, and gave her power to think and act rightly in this her hour of terrible trial; even as a little child, being behind the veil which separates the soul from God, may, in its innocent prattle, utter words of superhuman wisdom.

"I am sorry if I have interrupted you when you have company," she said slowly. "I am a stranger — an American."

"Ah, you Americans are a happy lot and may go where you please. Take this seat by the window; it is very warm. My son has been in America, but he tells us so little, we are none the wiser for that, about your part of the world."

"I knew him in America. That is why I called."

"Yes?" The mother bent forward and regarded her curiously, attentively.

"He lived very near us. He did a great deal of good — among the poor." She put her hand to her slender white throat, then dropped it again in her lap. Then, looking in Lady Thryng's eyes, she said: "I have seen your picture. I should have known you from that, but you are more beautiful."

"Oh! That can hardly be, my dear! It was taken many years ago, you know."

"Yes, he said so — his lordship — only there we called him Doctah Thryng."

A shadow flitted over the mother's face. "He was a practitioner over there — never in England."

"That is a pity; it is such noble work. But perhaps he has other things to do here."

"He has — even more noble work than the practice of medicine."

"What does he do here?" asked Cassandra, in a low voice.

"He must take part in the affairs of government. Very ordinary men may study and practise medicine, but unless men who are wise, and are nobly born and bred, make it their business to care for the affairs of their country, the nation would soon be wrecked. That is what saves England and makes her great."

"I see." Cassandra sat silent then, and Lady Thryng waited expectantly for her errand to be declared, curious about this beautiful young creature who had stepped into her home unannounced from out of the unknown, yet graciously kindly and unhurried. "I think I know. With us men are too careless. They think it isn't necessary, I suppose." Again she paused with parted lips, as if she would speak on, but could not.

"With you, men are too busy making money, I am told. It is necessary to have a leisure class like ours."

"Oh!" Cassandra caught her breath and smiled. She was thinking of the silver pot her mother had enjoined her to take with her, and why. "But we do think a great deal of family; even the simplest of us care for that, although we have no leisure class — only the loafers. I'm afraid you think it very strange I should come to you in this way, but I — thought I would like to see Doctah Thryng again, and when I heard he was not in England, I thought I would come to you and bring the messages from those who loved him when he was with us. But I mustn't stop now and take your time. I'll write them instead, only that wouldn't be like seeing him. He stayed a whole year at our place."

"And you came from Canada?"

"Oh, no. A long way from there. My home is in North Carolina."

"Oh, indeed! How very interesting! That must have been when he was so ill." Then, noticing Cassandra's extreme pallor, she begged her most kindly to come out on the terrace and have tea; but she would not. She felt her fortitude giving way, and knew she must hasten. "But you must, you know. The heat and your long ride have made you faint."

"I — I'm afraid so. It — won't — last."

"Wait, then. You must take a little wine; you need it." Roused to sympathy, Lady Thryng left her a moment and returned immediately with a glass of wine, which she held to her lips with her own hand. "There, you will soon be better. Here is a fan. It really is very warm. Indeed, you must have tea before you go."

She took her passive hand and led her out on the terrace unresisting, and again Cassandra was minded to throw her arms about the lovely woman's neck, who was so sweet and kind, and sob on her bosom and tell her all — but David had his own reasons, and she would not.

"Do you stay long in England?"

"I am going to-morrow. Oh!" she exclaimed, as they stepped out, and she saw the number of elaborately dressed guests moving about and gayly chatting and laughing. "I can't go out there. I am a strangah." It was a low melancholy wail as she said it, and long afterward Lady Thryng remembered that moaning cry, "I am a strangah."

"No, no. You are an American and a very beautiful one. Come, they will be glad to meet you. Give me your name again."

"Thank you — but I must — must go back." Suddenly, with a cry, "My baby, he is mine," she swept forward with long, swinging steps toward a group who were bending over a rosy-cheeked girl, who was seated on the steps of the terrace with a child in her arms. She was comforting him and cuddling and petting him, and those around her were exclaiming as young girls will: "Isn't he a dear!" — "Oh, let me hold him a moment!" — "There, he is going to cry again. No wonder, poor little chap!" — "Oh, look at his curls — so cunning — give him to me."

Seeing his mother, he put up his arms to her and smiled, while two tears rolled down his round baby cheeks.

"I found him in the pony carriage with Hetty Giles, and he was crying so — and such a darling! I just took him away — the love!" cried Laura. "Why, we saw you yesterday at the Victoria. I could not pass him by, you remember?"

The baby, one beaming smile, nestled his face bashfully in his mother's neck and patted her cheek, glancing sidewise at his admirers through brimming tears, while Cassandra, her eyes large and pathetic, turned now on Laura, now on her mother, stood silent, quivering like one of her own mountain creatures brought to bay. But she was strengthened as she felt her baby again in her arms, and as she stood thus looking about her, every one became silent, and she was constrained to speak. She did not know that something in her manner and appearance had commanded silence — something tragic — despairing. It was but for an instant, then she turned to Lady Laura.

"Thank you for comforting him. I ought not to have left him. I nevah did before, with strangahs." She tried to bid Lady Thryng good-by, but Laura again besought her to stop and have tea.

"Please do. I fairly adore Americans. I want to talk to you; I mean, to hear you talk."

Cassandra had mastered herself at last, and replied quietly: "I don't guess I can stay, thank you. You have been so kind." Then she said to Lady Thryng, "Good-by," and moved away. Laura walked by her side to the carriage.

"I hope you'll come again sometime, and let me know you."

"You are right kind to say that. I shall nevah forget." Then, leaning down from the carriage seat, and looking steadily in Laura's warm, dark eyes, she added: "No, I shall nevah forget. May I kiss you?"

"You sweet thing!" said the girl, impulsively, and, reaching up, they kissed. Cassandra said in her heart, "For David," and was driven away.

Laura found her mother standing where they had left her. She had been deeply stirred by the sight of Cassandra with the child in her arms. Not that beautiful mothers

Cassandra stood silent, quivering like one of her own mountain creatures brought to bay. *Page 286.*

and lovely children were rare in England; but that, except for the children of the poor, no little one like this had been in her own home or so near her in all the years of her widowhood. It was the sight of that strong mother love, overpowering and sweeping all before it, recognizing no lesser call — the secret and holy power that lies in the Christ-mother, for all periods and all peoples — she herself had felt it — and the cry that had burst from Cassandra's lips, "My baby — he is mine." Tears stood in Lady Thryng's eyes, and yet it was such a simple little thing. Mothers and babies? Why, they were everywhere.

"She moved like a tragic queen," said Lady Clara. "What was the matter?"

"Nothing, only her baby had been crying; but wasn't he a love?" said Lady Laura.

"I say! He was a perfect dear!" said one and another.

"I don't care much for babies," said Lady Clara. "They ought to be trained to stay with their nurses and not cry after their mammas like that. Fancy having to take such a child around with one everywhere, even in making a formal call, you know! Isn't it absurd? American women spoil their children dreadfully, I have heard."

CHAPTER XXXI

IN WHICH DAVID AND HIS MOTHER DO NOT AGREE

THE day after Cassandra's flight from Queensderry David returned. Although greatly prolonged, his African expedition had been successful, and he was pleased. He had improved his opportunities to learn political conditions and know what might best advance England's power in that remote portion of her possessions.

Mr. Stretton had informed him that he might soon be called to a seat in the House, and he was glad to be in a measure prepared to hold opinions of his own on a few, at least, of the vital issues. Canada he already knew well, and to be conversant also with the state of affairs in South Africa gave him greater confidence.

The first afternoon of his return he spent in looking over the changes which had been in progress at Daneshead during his absence. In spite of his weariness, he seemed buoyant and gay, more so, his mother thought, than at any time since his return from America. She said nothing about the episode of Cassandra's call, — possibly for the time it was forgotten, — but as they parted for the night, when they were alone together, Lady Thryng again broached to her son the subject of his marriage.

"We have had a visit from Lady Clara Temple," she said.

David lay upon a divan with his hands clasped beneath his head, and the light from a reading lamp streamed upon his sunny hair, which always looked as if some playful breeze had just lifted it. His whole frame had the sinewy appearance of energy and power. His mother's heart swelled with love and pride as she looked at his smiling, thoughtful face, and down upon his lean, strong body that in its lassitude expressed the vigor of a splendid animal at rest.

Still more would she have given thanks for the restoration of this beloved son could she have been able to contrast his present state with his condition when, ill and discouraged, he had gone to the lonely log cabin in a wilderness, struggling to build up both body and spirit, far from the sympathy and fellowship of his own.

Now she thrilled with the thought of what he might achieve if only he would, but her heart misgave her that he still held some strange notions of life. She thought the surest way to control his quixotic impulses was to provide him with a good, practical wife, — one who would see the world as it is and accept conditions that are stable, not trying to move mountains, yet with sufficient ambition for both her husband and herself. With a wife and children a man could not afford to be erratic.

"What were you saying, mother?"

"What were you thinking, David, that you did not hear me? I am telling you we have just had a very delightful visit from Lady Clara Temple, and Lady Temple and her son have called."

David made no reply. He seemed to think the remark called for none. "Well, David?"

"Well, mother?" and then: "I think I will go to bed. I am rarely tired, and bed is the place for me." He kissed his mother, then took hold of her chin and lifted her face to look in his eyes. "What is it, little mother, what is it?" he asked gayly and obtusely.

"Aren't you a bit stupid, David, not to see? I wish — I do wish you could care for Lady Clara. She really is charming."

"I do care for her — as Lady Clara Temple. She is charming, and, as you say of me, a bit stupid. What has Laura been doing these two months?"

"Preparing for her coming out after her own fashion. We've been a good deal in town, but she has a reckless way of doing anything she pleases, quite regardless."

"She is a big-hearted fine lass, mother. Don't let her ways trouble you."

"She needs the right influence, and Lady Clara seems to exert it over her — at least I think she will in time."

"Ah, very good, let her. I won't interfere. Good night, little mother; sleep well. If I am late in the morning,

don't be annoyed. I've had three wakeful nights. The sea was very rough."

"David!" Lady Thryng placed her hands on his shoulders and held him, looking in his eyes. "Marry Lady Clara. You are worthy of a princess, my son. You can afford to be ambitious. The day may come when you can entertain the king."

"Now really, mother; I'll entertain the king with pleasure. He's a fine old chap. A little gay, you know, but quite the right sort. But Lady Clara is a step too high. She'd rub it into me some day that I'd married above my station, you know. Good night. Dream of the king, mother, but not of Lady Clara."

He sought his bed, and was soon soundly sleeping, content with the thought that next week he would sail for America and have Laura's coming out postponed. The family festivity was following too closely on the year of mourning, at any rate. The announcement that he already had a penniless American wife would naturally be a blow to them, all the more so if his mother was seriously cherishing such hopes as she had expressed; but he couldn't be a cad. His conscience smote him that his conduct already bordered closely on the caddish, but to be an out and out cad, — no, no.

When he awoke, — late, as he had said, but refreshed and jubilant, — the revelation he must make seemed to him less formidable, and he was minded to make it with no more delay as he tossed over his mail, while breakfasting in his room.

"Ah, what is this?" A letter in his wife's hand, bearing the Liverpool postmark! Was she on her way to him, then? "Good God!" He tore off the cover hastily, but sat a moment with bowed head, his hand over his eyes, before reading it.

"My dear David, — My husband, forgive me. I have done wrong, but I meant to do right. They said words of you, — on our mountain, David, — words I hated; and I lied to them and came to you. I told them you had sent for me. I did it to prove to them that what they were saying was not true. I took the money you gave me and came to England, and now God has punished

me, and I am going back. I know you will be surprised when I tell you how wrong I have been. I would not write you I had borne you a little son, because I did not want you to come back to America for his sake, but for mine. My heart was that proud. Oh! David, forgive me." David's face grew pale, and the paper trembled in his hand, but he read eagerly on.

"My heart cries to you all the time. He is yours, David; forgive me. He is very beautiful. He is like you. Your sister held him in her arms, and I kissed her for love of you, but she did not know why. She did not guess the beautiful baby was yours — your very own. Your mother saw him, but she did not guess he was hers — her little grandson. I took him away quickly. They might have kept him if they knew. You will let me have him a little longer, won't you, David? When he is older, you will have to take him home and educate him, but now — now — he is all I have of you. Soon the terrible ocean will be between us again.

"It will be just the same in your home now as if I had never come. I did not say I was your wife — for you had not — and I would not tell them. I want you to know this, so nothing will be changed by me. In London, before I knew, when I thought you were there, when I did not understand, I wrote my name in the hotel book, but in Queensderry something in my heart stopped me and I only wrote my old name, Cassandra Merlin. I must have been beginning to understand."

David paused and dashed the tears from his eyes. "Poor little heart! Poor little heart!" he cried. He paced the room, then tried to read again. The letters, blurred by his tears, seemed to dance about and run together.

"Now I see it all clearly, David, and, after a little, God will help me to live on the happiness you brought me in our sweet year together. There was happiness for a lifetime in that year. Comfort your heart with that thought when you think of me, and do not be too sad.

"Oh, David! I did not know that to save me from marrying Frale and living a life worse than death you sacrificed yourself. But you did not need to do it. After knowing you and after doing what he did to you, I

never could have married him. I only knew you came to me and saved me from the terrible life I might have led, and I took you as from God. I have seen the beautiful lady you should have married, and I don't know what to do, nor how to give you back to yourself. I suppose there may be a way, but we have made our vows to each other before God, and we must do no sin. My heart is heavy. I would give you all, all, but I can't take back the love I gave you. I could die to set you free again, for in that way I could keep the blessed love which is part of my soul, in heaven with me, only for our little son. My life is his now, too, and I have no right to die, not yet, even to set you free.

"Oh, David, David! This must be the shadow I saw clouding our long path of light. In some terrible way it has been laid on me to do you a wrong in the eyes of your family and all your world. Your mother told me you had work to do for your country, great and glorious work. I believe it, and you must do it and not let an ignorant mountain girl stand in your way.

"Oh! I can't think it out to-night. When I try to see a way, I can't. The visions are lost to my eyes, and they may never come again. The windows of my soul are clouded, and the clear seeing is gone, because, David, I know it is myself that comes between. I can only cry to you now to forgive me. Don't let me mar your great, good life. Don't try to come back to me. Stay on and live your life and do your work, and I will keep your little son safe for you, and teach him to love you and call you father, and he shall be called David. He has no name yet; I was waiting for you. It will only be a little while before he will need you, then you may take him. Your mother and sister will love him. He will be a great boy full of laughter and light, like you, David, and then your mountain girl wife will be gone and your sacrifice at an end, and your reward will come at last.

"I will go back and stay quietly where I belong. Don't send me any more money. I have enough to take me home, and I can earn all we need after that. Earning will help me by giving me something to do for our baby and so for you. Sometimes I will send you word that all is well with him, but do not write to me any more. It

will be easier for you so, and don't let your heart be too much troubled for me, David. It will interfere with your power and usefulness in your own world. Grieving is like fire set to a great tree. It burns the heart out of it first, and leaves the rest. A man must not be like that. With a woman it is different. Be glad that you did save me and brought me all these months of sweet, sweet happiness. I will live on the remembrance.

"People have to bear the separation of death, and we will call the ocean that divides us Death, for our two worlds are divided by it. I sail to-morrow. You took me into your heart to save me, and now, David my love, I go out of your heart to save you, and give you back to your own life. Some day the cords that bind us to each other, the cords our vows have made, will part and set you free. Good-by, good-by, David my heart, David my love, David, David. good-by.

"CASSANDRA MERLIN."

For a long instant David sat with the letter crushed in his hand, then suddenly awoke to energetic action.

"To-day? When does the boat leave? Good God! there may be time." He rang for a servant and began tossing his clothing together. "Curses on me for a cad — a boor — a lout — Why did I leave my mail until this morning and then oversleep! Clark," he said, as the man appeared, "tell Hicks to bring the machine around immediately, then come for my bag."

"Beg pardon, but the machine's out of order, my lord, and her ladyship's just going out in the carriage."

"Why is it out of order? Hicks is a fool. Ask Lady Thryng to wait. No, pack my bag and send my boxes on after me as they are. I'll speak to her myself."

He threw off his jacket, thrust his cap in his pocket, and dashed away, pulling on his coat as he went, holding the crushed pages of the letter in his hand. He overtook his mother as she was walking down the terrace.

"Mother, wait," he cried, "I'm going with you. Where's Laura?"

"She was coming. I can't think what is delaying her."

David hurried on to the carriage. "Get in, mother, I'll take her place. Get in, get in. We must be off."

"David, are you out of your head?"

"Yes, mother. Drive on, drive on. I must catch the first train for Liverpool — I may catch it. Put the horses through, John. Make them sweat," he said, leaning out of the carriage window.

"Explain yourself, David. Are you in trouble?"

"Yes, mother. Wait a little."

She looked at her son and saw his mouth set, his eyes stern and anguished, and she placed her hand gently on his as they were being whirled away. "Your bags are not in, David, if you are going a journey."

"Clark will follow with them, and I can wait in Liverpool, if I can only catch this boat."

"David, explain. If you can't, then let me read this," she pleaded, touching the letter in his hand; but he clutched it the tighter.

"No one may read this, not even you." He pressed the crumpled sheets to his lips, then folded them carefully away. "It's just that I've been a cad — a fiendish cad and an idiot in one. I thought myself a man of high ideals — My God, I am a cad!"

"David, you sacrificed yourself to ideals, but you are still a boy and have much to learn. When men try to set new laws for themselves and get out of the ordinary, they are more than apt to make fools of themselves, and may do positive harm. What is it now?"

"Can't you get over the ground any faster, John?" he cried, thrusting his head again out of the window. "These horses are overfed and lazy, like all the English people. Why was the machine out of order? Hicks is a fool — I say!" He put his hand inside his collar and pulled and worked it loose. "We are all hidebound here. Even our clothes choke us."

"David, tell me the truth."

"I am telling you the truth. I am a cad, I say. And you — you, too, are a part of the system that makes cads of us all."

"I am your mother, David," said Lady Thryng, reprovingly.

"You have reason to be proud of your son! Oh! curse me! I won't be more of a cad than I am now by laying the blame on you. I could have helped it, but

you couldn't. We are born and bred that way, over here. The petty lines of distinction our ancestors drew for us, — we bow down and worship them, and say God drew them. Over here a man hides the sun with his own hand and then cries out, 'Where is it?'"

"I would comfort you if I could, but this sounds very much like ranting. I thought you had outlived that sort of thing, my son."

"Thank God, no. I've been very hard pressed of late, but I've not outlived it."

"You will tell me this trouble — now — before you leave me? You must, dear boy." He took the hand she put out to him, and held it in silence; then, incoherently, in a voice humbled and low, — almost lost in the rumbling of the carriage, — he told her. It was a revelation of the soul, and as the mother listened she too suffered and wept, but did not relent.

Cassandra's cry, "I am a strangah!" sounded in her ears, but her sorrow was for her son. Yes, she was a stranger, and had wisely taken herself back to her own place; what else could she do? Was it not in the nature of a Providence that David had been delayed until after her departure? The duty now devolved upon herself to comfort him without further reproof, but nevertheless to make him see and do his duty in the position he had been called to fill.

"Of course she has charm, David, and evidently good sense as well."

"How do you mean?"

"To perceive the inevitable and return without fuss or complaint to her own station in life."

For an instant he sat stunned, and ere he could give utterance to his rage, she resumed, "Naturally, marriage now, in your own class can't be; you'll simply have to live as a bachelor." David groaned. "Why, my son, many do, of their own choice, and you have managed to be happy during this year."

He glanced at his watch. "Eleven o'clock, — can't —"

"There's no use urging the horses so; we can't make it."

"We may, mother, we may." He half rose as if he would leap from the vehicle. "I could go faster on foot.

There's a quarter of an hour yet before the Liverpool express. John, can't we get on faster than this?"

"No, my lord. One of the 'orses has picked up a stone. If you'll 'old 'em I'll dig it out in 'alf a minute, my lord."

David sprang out and took the reins. "Where's the footman?" he asked testily.

"You left 'im behind, my lord. He was 'elping Lady Laura cut roses."

"David, this is useless. The last train from London went through an hour ago and we haven't ten minutes for the next. Order him to return and we'll consider calmly."

David laughed bitterly, and only sprang into the coach and shut the door with a crash. "Drive on, John," he shouted through the window, and again they were off at a mad gallop.

His mother turned and looked at him astounded. "Let me read what she has written you, my son," she implored, half frightened at his frenzy.

"It's of no use for you to read it. We can't talk now, not rationally."

"Then tell him not to drive so furiously, so we can hear each other."

"I would avoid useless discussion, mother, but you force it." An instant he paused, and his teeth ground together and his jaw set rigidly, then he continued with a savage force that appalled her, throwing out short sentences like daggers. "Lord H—— brings home an American wife. His family are well pleased. She is every where received. Her father is a rich brewer. Her brother has turned out his millions from the business of pork packing. The stench from his establishment polutes miles of country, but does not reach England — why? Because of the disinfectant process of transmuting their greasy American dollars into golden English sovereigns. There's justice."

"Be reasonable, David. Their estates were involved to the last degree and those sovereigns saved the family. Without them they would have passed out of their possession utterly, and been divided among our rich tradespeople, and the family would have descended rapidly to the undergrades. It goes to show the value of birth, what is more, and how those Americans, who made a pretence

long ago of scorning birth and title and casting it all off, are glad enough now to buy their way back again, if not for themselves, for their children. But, David, for a man to voluntarily degrade his family by marrying beneath him, with no such need as that of Lord H——, of ultimately by that very means lifting it up is — is — inexpressible — why — ! In the case of Lord H—— there was a certain nobility in marrying beneath him."

"Beneath him ! For me, I married above me, over all of us, when I took my sweet, clean mountain girl. The nobility of Lord H—— is unique. Lady H—— made a poor bargain when she left the mingled stenches of brewing and butchering to step into the moral stench which depleted the Stonebreck estates."

"You are not like my son, David. You are violent."

"Your son has been a cad. Now he is a man, and must either be violent or weep." He looked away from her out at the flying hedgerows, then took up the fruitless discussion again, striving with more patience to arouse in his mother a sense of the utter worldliness of her stand. She met him at every point with the obtuse and age-long arguments of her class. When at last he cried out, "But what of my son, mother, my little son, and the heir to all this grandeur which means so much to you ? Her eyelids quivered and she looked down, merely saying, "His mother has offered you a solution to that difficulty which seems to me the only wise one. You say she proposes to keep him a year or two and then send him to us."

"Ah, you are like steel, mother." David spoke pleadingly, "You thought him a beautiful child ? "

"I did, and a wholesome one, which goes to show that you may safely trust him with her for a time. Moreover, his mother has a right to him and the comfort she may find in him for a few years. You see I would be quite just to her. I do not accuse her of being designing in marrying you. No doubt it was quite your own fault. It is a position you two young people rushed into romantically and most foolishly, and you must both suffer the consequences. It is sad, but it must be regarded in the light of hard common sense, and my ungrateful task seems to be to place it in that light for both your sakes."

Still David watched the hedgerows with averted face.

"You are listening, David?"

"Yes, mother, yes. Common sense you said."

"Can't you see, that to bring her here, where she does not belong— where she never will be received as belonging, even though she is your wife — will only cause suffering to you both? Eventually misunderstandings will arise, then will come alienation and unhappiness. Then again, yours must be in a measure a public life, unless you mean to shirk responsibility. Has your country no claim on you?"

"I have no thought of shirking my duty, and am prepared to think and act also —"

"You wish it to be effective? Has it never occurred to you how your avenues will be cut off if you marry a wife beneath your class?"

"What in God's name will my wife have to do with England's African policy? Damme —"

"David!"

"Mother — I beg your pardon —"

"She may have everything to do with it. No man can stand alone and foist his ideas upon such a body of men, without backing. Instead of hampering yourself with an ignorant mountain girl from America, you should have allied yourself to a strong family of position here, if you would be a power in England. What sort of a Lady Thryng will your present wife make? What kind of a leader socially in your own class? You might better try to place a girl from the bogs of Ireland at the head of your table."

Again David's rage surged through him in a hot wave, but he controlled himself. "You admitted Cassandra has both beauty and charm?"

"Would my son have been attracted to her else? Nevertheless, what I say stands. As a help to you —"

"You have done your duty, mother. I will say this for you — that for sophistry undiluted, a woman of the present day who stands where you do, can out-Greek the ancients. How is it we see so differently? Is it that I am like my father? How did he see things?"

"Your father was as much a nobleman as your uncle. Only by the accident of birth was he differently placed.

Did I never tell you that but for his death he would have been created bishop of his diocese? So you see—"

"I see. By dying he just escaped a bishopric. Did it make a difference in his reception up above—do you think?"

"Oh, David, David!"

"I'm sorry mother—never mind. We're nearly there and I have something I must say to you before I leave you to end this discussion forever. There are two kinds of men in this world,—one sort is made by his circumstances, and the other makes his circumstances. You would respect your son more if he belonged to the first variety, but I tell you no. I will make my own conditions. Before all else, I am a man. My lordship was thrust upon me. Don't interrupt, I beg. I know all you would say, but you do not know all I would say—My birth gave it to me certainly, but a cruel and bloody war was the means by which it came to me. Very well. I will take it and the responsibility which it entails; but the cruelty that brought me my title is ended and in no form shall it be continued, social or otherwise. I hold to the rights of my manhood. I will bring to England whom I please as my wife, and my world shall recognize her, and you will receive her because I bring her, and because she will stand head and soul above any one you have here to propose for me. Here we are, mother dear. One kiss? Thank you, thank you. Postpone Laura's coming out until—I return—which will be—when—you know."

He leaped from the carriage before it had time to halt, and ran, but alas! baffled and enraged at his ill success, he stood on the platform and watched the train pull out. It was only a slow local puffing away there.

"Liverpool express left five minutes ago, my lord," said the guard.

His mother leaned out, watching him with sad, yet eager eyes, satisfied that it should be so. He might return now, and there was by no means an end to her opposition.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN WHICH CASSANDRA BRINGS THE HEIR OF DANESHEAD CASTLE BACK TO HER HILLTOP, AND THE SHADOW LIFTS

"CASSANDRY MERLIN, whar did you drap from?" cried the Widow Farwell, as she looked up from the supper she was preparing at the great fireplace, and saw her daughter in the doorway with her baby. Her old face radiated light and warmth and love as she took them both in her arms. "Whar's David?"

Cassandra smiled wearily, returning her mother's kiss and yielding her the baby. "You'll have to be satisfied with me and little son, mother. David was still in Africa, so I came home again." She spoke as if a trip to England were a casual little matter, and this was all the explanation she gave that night. "I got the hotel carriage to bring me up from the station."

The mother, with quaint simplicity, accepted it, asking no troublesome questions. If David was not there, why should not her daughter return. After their supper together, in the warm, starlit evening, each member of the family carrying something for the traveller's comfort, they all climbed up to Cassandra's cabin, and the old life began as if it had suffered no interruption. Cassandra so filled the pauses with questions of all that had happened during her absence that it was only after her mother was in bed and dropping off to sleep she remembered questions of her own that had been unasked, or left unanswered.

The next day Cassandra pleaded weariness and stayed in her cabin, sending Martha down for her necessary supplies, and quietly occupying herself with setting her simple home in its accustomed order. The day after, she spent overlooking the little farm with Cotton, and hearing from him all about the animals. The cows, two little calves, Frale's colt, and her own filly, and how "some

ol' houn' dog" had got into the sheep-pen and killed the mother sheep, and "Marthy" had brought the twin lambs up by hand. And while Cassandra busied herself thus, the widow kept charge of the little grandson, warming her heart with his baby ways, petting him and solacing herself for his long absence.

Thus the first days were lived through, and no further explanation made, for something held Cassandra silent in a strange waiting suspense. It was not hope, for she felt that she had taken a stand which was conclusive, and there was nothing more for which to hope. What else could she do, and what could David do? The conditions were made for them; each must bide in his own world, and she had named the ocean which divided them, "Death."

At night she did not weep, for weeping made her ill, and she must conserve her strength for her little son, so she lay staring out at the stars. Sometimes she found herself holding her breath and listening, — half lifting her head from her pillow, — but listening for what? Then she would lean over her baby's cradle, and hear his soft breathing, trying to make herself think she was listening for that and not for David's step. Then she would lie back and try again to sleep, and her heart would cry to God to give her peace, and let her rest. So the long nights passed, tearlessly and sleeplessly.

On the boat she had slept, lulled by its rocking and swaying, but here in her home — in her accustomed routine — sleep had fled, and old thoughts and dreams came like the dead to haunt her. The paleness which had come upon her in London, and which the sea breeze had supplanted with fleeting roses, returned, and she moved about looking as if only her wraith had come back to its old haunts.

On the third day after Cassandra's return, David found himself climbing the laurel path a far different man from the one who, two years before, had slowly and wearily toiled up to the little house of logs which was to be his shelter. With strong, free step and heart uplifted and glad, he now climbed that winding path. He had conquered the ills of his body, and his spirit had lived and loved, and he had learned to know happiness from

its counterfeit. He had gone out and seen men chasing phantoms and shadows thinking therein to find joy — joy — the need of the world — one in a coronet, one in a crown, and the beggar in a golden sovereign — while he — he had found it in his own heart and in Cassandra's eyes.

David had passed the Fall Place, seeing no one; for the widow had ridden over to spend the day with Sally Carew, her niece was in the spring-house skimming cream, while Cotton was dawdling in the corn patch whistling and pulling the ripened ears from the stalks. A cool breeze had dispelled the heat of the September afternoon, and the hills were already beginning to don their gorgeous apparel after the summer's drouth; their wonderful beauty struck him anew and steeped his senses with their charm.

If only all was well with his wife — his wife and his little son! His heart beat so madly as he neared the thicket of laurel where once he had stood to watch her moving about his cabin, that he was forced to pause; and again he saw her, standing in her homespun dress, strongly relieved against the whiteness of the canvas room beyond — but this time not alone — Ah, not alone! Holding his little son in her arms, her body swaying with rhythmic motion, lulling him to drowsiness and sleep, she stooped to lay him in the rude little cradle box.

David trembled as he watched, and dashed the tears from his eyes, but could not move to break too soon this breathless, poignant spell of gladness. Suddenly he could wait no longer, but his feet clung to the earth when he would move, and his mouth went dry. Ah, could he never reach her? He stood holding out his arms, when, oh, wonder of wonders! she raised herself and stood as if listening, then, moving swiftly, walked from the cabin and came to him as if she had heard him call, although he had made no sound — her arms outstretched to him as were his to her.

She did not cry out, but with parted lips and radiant, glowing face, fled to him and was clasped to his heart. She could feel its beating against her breast, and his silence spoke to her through his eyes, which saw not her face but her soul; his lips brought the roses to her cheeks as the sea breezes had done — roses that came and fled

and came again — until at last it was Cassandra who spoke first.

"I want you to see him, David."

"Yes, yes, my wife," was all he said, his eyes on hers, but he did not move.

"I want you to see our little son, David." A strange pang shot through his heart. Still he stood, holding her and marvelling at himself. What! Was it that this young usurper had stolen into his place?

"Love is selfish, dear. Let me recover from one joy before you overwhelm me with another. First, I must have my own, and know that it is all mine."

"I don't understand, David. I can't wait. Oh! David — David!"

"You turn my name to music with your tones lingering over it. I had forgotten how sweet it was."

"But I don't understand, David. Come and see him." And as she drew him forward, they moved as one being, not two.

"No, you don't understand, thank God. But I will teach you something you never knew. Love is not only blind, dearest; he is a greedy, selfish little god."

Then she laughed happily, holding him at arm's-length and looking in his eyes. "I know it. I know it. I found it out all by myself. Didn't I tell you in my letter? Oh, David, so was I!" She drew him to her again and nestled her face in his bosom. "I was jealous of our little son. I wanted you, David — Oh! I wanted you." At last came the tears, the blessed human tears which she had held back so long. But now they did no harm except to drench her husband's gray tie, and they brought a lovely flush to her face. "I can't stop, David; I can't stop. I haven't cried for so long, and now I can't stop."

"Sweetheart, don't try to stop. Cry it all out. Wash the stains from me of the cruel old world where I have been; cleanse me so that I may see as clearly as you see; but you would have to cry forever to do that, wouldn't you, sweet? And soon you must laugh again."

He clasped and comforted her as she was used to comfort her baby, soothing her and drying her eyes with his own handkerchief. "Yours isn't large enough for such a flood, is it, sweet?"

"No, a — a — and I — I can-can't find mine," she sobbed. "I — I — left it tucked under baby's chin — and now I've spoiled your pretty gray tie."

"Bless you! They are my tears, and it is my tie —"

"David! He is crying — hark!"

"Helping his mother, is he? Come then, his father will comfort him."

"Hear him. Isn't it a sweet little cry, David?" She smiled at him from under tear-wet lashes.

"Why, bless you again! Yours was a sweet little cry." They went in, and he bent over the odd little cradle and lifted the child tenderly from its soft nest. The wailing ceased, and the fatherhood awoke in him and laughed with joy as he held the warm little body to his heart, wherein now, he knew, lay the key of life — the complete and rounded love, God's gift to man, to be cherished when found, and fought for and held in the holy of holies of his own soul.

"He isn't afraid, you see, David. How he stares at you! Does he feel it in his own little heart that you are his father? I have whispered it to him a thousand, thousand times. Sit here with him, David, and I'll make you some tea." She busied herself with the tea things — the old life beginning anew — with a new interest.

"I always make it just as you taught me that first day when I came up here so choked with trouble I couldn't speak. You always brought me good, David."

He saw as he watched her that some new and subtile charm had been added to her personality. Was it motherhood that had given it to her, or the long year of patient waiting and trusting; or had she passed through depths of which he as yet knew nothing, to cause this evanescent breath of pathos? He felt and knew it was all of these. What must she have endured as she wrote that letter!

David fell easily and happily into his life on the mountain again — not the English lord, but the vital, human being, the man in splendid possession of himself and his impulses, holding sacred his rights as a man, not to be coerced by custom or bound by any chains save those he himself had forged to bind his heart before God.

For a time he would not allow himself to think of the

future, preferring to live thus with the world completely shut away. Buoyantly, jubilantly, he tramped the hills and visited the homes where he had been wont to bring help and often comforts, and found himself therein lauded and idolized as few of his station ever are.

Again he was "Doctah Thryng," and the love that accompanied the title, in the hearts of those mountain people, was regal. He enjoyed his little farm, and the gathering of his first "crap," counting his bundles of fodder and his bushels of corn. Sometimes he rode with Cassandra, visiting the old haunts; at such times David insisted that the boy be left with the grandmother or that Martha should come up to mind him, that he might have his wife free and quite to himself as in their first days.

But all this time, although silent about it, Cassandra kept in her heart the thought of David's real state. She felt he was playing a part to bring her joy, and was grateful, but she knew he must return to his own world and live his own life. Therefore she existed in a state of breathless suspense, to enjoy these moments to the fullest, — not to miss or mar an instant of the blessed time while it lasted.

The days were flying — flying — so rapidly she dared not think, and here was splendid October trailing her wonderful draperies over the hills like a lavish princess. When would David speak? But perhaps he was waiting for her to speak first? If so, how long ought she to remain silent? Often he caught the wistful look in her eyes, and half divined the meaning.

One day when they had wandered up her father's path, and the wind came in warm, soft gusts, sweeping over the miles of splendor from the sea, David drew her to him, determined to win from her a full expression.

"What is it, Cassandra? Open your heart. Don't shut anything away from me. What have you been dreaming lately?"

"You have never said a word of fault with me yet, David — for what I did, going away off there and not waiting quietly until you could come back, as you wrote me to do."

"That was the bravest, finest thing you ever did — but one." He was thinking of her renunciation.

"You are so good to forgive me, David. In one way it

was better that I went, because it made me understand as I never could have done otherwise. You would never have told me, but now I know."

"Unfold a little of this wisdom, so I may judge of its value."

"Can you, David? I'm afraid not. You have a way of bewildering me, so I can't see the rights and wrongs of things myself. But there! It is just part of the difference. Why, even the nursemaids over there, and Hetty Giles, the landlady's daughter, are wiser than I. I came to see it every instant, the difference between you and me — between our two worlds. David, how did you ever dare marry me?"

He only laughed happily and kissed her. "Tell it all," he said tenderly.

"I felt it first when I went to the town house. It was hard to find the address. I only had Mr. Stretton's." David set his teeth grimly in anger at himself at giving her only his lawyer's address, in stupid fear lest her letters betray him to his mother and sister.

"Now, do not hide one thing from me — not one," he said sternly, and she continued, with a conscientious fear of disobedience, to open her heart.

"I saw by the look in the old man's eyes that I had not done the right thing, coming in that way with a baby in my arms, like a beggar. I saw he was very curious, and I was that proud I didn't know what to tell him I had come for, when I found you were not there, so when he said artists often came to see the gallery, I said I had come to see the gallery; and David, I didn't even know what a gallery was. I thought it was a high piazza around a house, and I found it was a great room full of pictures. I was that ignorant.

"I felt like I was some wild creature that had got lost in that splendid palace and didn't know where to run to get away; and they all fixed their eyes on me as if they were saying: 'How does she dare come here? She isn't one of us!' and one was a boy who looked like you. The old man kept saying how like it was to the new Lord Thryng, and it made me cold to hear it, — so cold that after I had escaped from there and was out in the sun, my teeth chattered."

David sat silent and humbled; at last he said: "Go on, Cassandra. Don't cover up anything."

"When I got back to the hotel, everything seemed so splendid and stuffy and horrid — and every way I turned it seemed as if those dead ancestors of yours were there staring at me still; and I thought what right had they over the living that they dared stand between you and me; and I was angry." She stirred in his arms, and pressed closer to him. "David — forgive me — I can't tell it over — it hurts me."

"Go on," he said hoarsely.

"The old man told me what was expected of you because of them — how your mother wished you to marry a great lady — and I knew they could never have heard of me — and I forgot to eat my dinner and stayed in my room and fought and fought with myself — I'm sorry I felt that way, David. Don't mind. I understand now." She put up her hand and touched his cheek, and he took it in his and kissed it. Then she laughed a sad little laugh.

"Remember that funny little old silver teapot. Mother brought it to me before I left, and I took it with me! She is so proud of our family, although she has only that poor little pot to show for it, with its nose all melted off to make silver bullets sure to kill. Did you know it was one of those bullets Frale tried to kill you with? Oh, David, David!"

"And yet your mother is right, dear. That little wrecked bit of silver helps to interpret you — indicates your ancestors — how you come to be you — just as you are. How could I ever have loved you, if you had been different from what you are?"

For a long moment she lay still — scarcely breathing — then she lifted her head and looked in his eyes. One of her silences was on her, and while her lips trembled as if to speak, she said no word. He tried to draw her to him again, but she held him off.

"Then tell me what it is," he said gently. But she only shook her head and rose to walk away from him. He did not try to call her back to him, respecting her silence, and she moved on up the path with long, swift steps.

When she returned, he held out his arms to her, but she stood before him looking down into his eyes, "I couldn't

tell you sitting there with your arms around me, David, and what I have to say must be said now; I may never be strong enough to say it another time, and it must be said."

Then she told him all that had occurred while she was in Queensderry, from the moment she came, going down into her heart and revealing the hidden thoughts never before expressed even to herself, while he gazed back into her eyes fascinated by her spiritual beauty which was her power.

She told of the chatter of Hetty Giles, and how she had pointed out the beautiful lady his mother wished him to marry — and how slowly everything had dawned upon her — the real differences. Of the guests she had seen on the Daneshead terrace and how they wore such lovely dresses and moved so easily and laughed and talked all at once, as if they were used to it all, and perhaps wore such charming things for every day — the wonderful colors and wide, beautiful hats with plumes — and how even the servants wore pretty clothes and went about as if they all knew how to do things, passing cups and plates.

Then she told of her talk with his mother and how carefully she had guarded her tongue lest a word escape her he would rather not have had her speak. "I had wronged you in not telling you you had a son, and I meant to leave him with your mother so he could be raised right." She paused, and put her hand to her throat, then went bravely on. "Your mother was kind — she gave me wine — she brought it to me herself. I knew what I ought to do, but I wasn't strong enough. It seemed as if something here in my breast was bleeding, and my baby would die if I did it. When I came out, he was in your sister's arms and had been crying, and it seemed as if all I had planned had happened, and I took him and carried him away quickly. I couldn't go fast enough, and I left the inn that night. The world seemed all like *Vanity Fair*."

David rose and stood before her looking down into her eyes. He could not control his voice in speaking, and she felt his hands quiver as they rested on her shoulders. "When did you read that book, Cassandra? Where did you find it?" he asked, in dismay.

"Among your books in the cabin. I felt at first that it must be a kind of a disgrace to be a lord — as if every one who had a title or education must be mean and low, and

all the rest of the world over there must be fools; but because of you, David, I knew better than to believe that. Your mother is not like those women, either. She was kind and beautiful, and — I — loved her, but all the more I saw the difference. But now you have come to me and made me strong, I can do it. Everything has grown clear to me again, and I see how you gave yourself to me — to save me — when you did not dream of what was to be for you in the future; and out of your giving has come the — little son, and he is yours. Wait! Don't take me in your arms." She placed her hands on his breast and held him from her.

"So it was just now — when you spoke as if people would understand me better because of that little silver pot, showing I had somewhere in the past a name and a family like theirs over there — I thought of 'Vanity Fair,' and I hated it. I wish you had never seen it. There is, nor has been, nothing on earth to make me possible for you, now — your inheritance has come to you. I have a pride, too, David, a different kind of pride from theirs. You loved me first, I know, as I was — just me. It was a foolish love for you to have, David dear, — but I know it is true; you could not have given yourself to save me else, and I like to keep that thought of you in my heart, big and noble and true — that you did love just me." She faltered, but still held him from her. "Do you think I would not do all I can to keep from spoiling your life over there?"

"Stop, stop. It is enough," he cried. In spite of herself, he took her hands in his and drew her to him in penitent tenderness. "I'm no great lord with wide distances between me and your mountain world here, Cassandra; never think it. I'm tremendously near to the soul of things, and the man of the wilderness is strong in me. One thing you have not touched upon. Tell me, what did Frale say or do to you to so trouble you and send you off?"

She stirred in his arms and waited, then murmured, "He pestered me."

"Explain. Did he come often?"

"Oh, no. He — I — he came one evening up to our cabin, and — I sent him off and started next day."

"But explain, dearest. How did he act? What was it?"

She was silent, but drew her husband's head down and hid her face in his neck. "There! Never mind, love. You needn't tell me if you don't wish."

"He kissed me and held me in his arms like they were iron bands — and I hated it. He said you had gone away never to come back, and that the whole mountain side knew it; and that he had a right to come and claim my promise to him. Oh, David, David, this is the last. I have kept nothing back from you now, nothing. My heart cried out for you — like I heard you call — and I went — to — to prove to them all that word was a lie. I knew nothing they said here could touch you, but I couldn't bear that the meanest hound living should dare think wrong of you. Seems like I would have done it if I had had to crawl on my knees and swim the ocean."

"My fingers tingle to grasp the throat of that young man. I fought him for you once, and if it hadn't been for a rolling stone under my foot, it would have been death for one of us. As it was, I won — with you to save me — bless you."

"But now, David —"

"Ah, but now — what? Are you happy?"

"That isn't what I mean. You have your future —"

"I have my now. It is all we ever have. The past is gone, and lives only in our memories, and the future exists only in anticipation; but now — now is all we have or can have. Live in it and love in it and be happy."

"But we must be wise. We've got to face it sometime. Let — me help you — now while I have the strength," she pleaded earnestly.

But David only laughed out joyously, and looked at his wife until she turned her face away from him. "Look at me," he cried. "Dear, troubled eyes. Tears? Tears in them? Love, you have kept nothing back this time, and now it is my turn, but I shall keep something back from you. I'm not going to reprove your idolatry by turning iconoclast and throwing your miserable old idol down from his pedestal all at once. I tell you what it is, though, if I could feel that I was worthy of your smallest finger — that I deserved only one of those big tears — there — there — there! Listen, dearest, I'll come to the point.

"Who is it now, making so much of the estimates of the world? Somehow our viewpoints have got mixed. Sacrifice myself? Why, Cassandra, if I were to lose you out of my life, I should be a broken-hearted man. What did I sacrifice? Phantoms, vanities, and emptiness. Oh, Cassandra, Cassandra, my priestess of all that is good! Open your eyes, love, and see as I see — as you have taught me to see.

"Much that we strive for and reckon as gain is really worthless. Why, sweet, I would far, far rather have you at your loom for the mother of my son, than Lady Clara at her piano. Your heritage of the great nature — the far-seeing — the trusting spirit — harboring no evil and construing all things to righteousness — going out into the world and finding among all the dust and dross, even of centuries, only the pure gold — the eye that sees into a man's soul, searching out the true and lovely qualities there and transmuting all the rest into pure metal — my own soul's alchemist — your heritage is the secret of power."

"I don't believe I understand all you are saying, David. I only see that I have a very hard task before me, and now I know it is hard for you, too. Your mother made it clear to me that your true place is not living here as a doctor, even though you do so much good among us. I saw all at once that men are born each to fill a place in the world, and I think each man's measure should be the height of his own power and ability, nothing lower than that; and I see it — your power will be there, not here, where it must be limited by our limits and ignorance. That is your own country over there. It claims you — and I — I — there is the difference, you know. Think of your mother, and then of mine. David, I must not — Oh, David! You must be unhampered — free — what can I — what can we do?"

"We can just go down the mountain, sane beings, to our own little cabin, belonging to each other first of all." He took her hand and led her along the path, carpeted with pine needles and fallen leaves. "And then, when you are ready and willing — not before, love — we will go home — to my home — just like this, together."

She caught her breath. "Listen, for I am seeing visions

too, now, as you have taught me. I will lead you through those halls and show you to all those dead ancestors, and I will dress you in a silken gown, the color of the evening star we used to watch together from our cabin door, and around your neck I will hang the yellow pearls that have been worn by all those great ladies who stared at you from out their frames of gold the day you came alone and unrecognized, bearing your priceless gift in your arms. You shall wear the rich old lace of the family on your bosom, and the jewelled coronet on your head; and no one will see the silk and the jewels and the lace, for looking at you and at the gift you bring.

"No, don't speak; it is my turn now to see the pictures. All will be yours, whatever you see and touch in those stately homes — for you will be the Lady Thryng, and, being the Lady Thryng, you will be no more wonderful or beautiful than you were when you climbed to me, following my flute notes, or when you bent between me and the fire preparing my supper, or when you were weaving at your loom, or when you came to me from our cabin door with your arms outstretched and the light of all the stars of heaven in your eyes."

Then they were silent, a long silence, until, seated together in their cabin before a bright log fire, as she held their baby to her breast, Cassandra broke the stillness.

"Now I see it better, David. As you came here and lived my life, and loved me just as I was — so to be truly one, I must go with you and live your life. I must not fail you there."

"You have been tried as by fire and have not failed — nor are you the kind of woman who ever fails."

Then she smiled up at him one of those rare and fleeting smiles that always touched David with poignant pleasure, and said: "I think I understand now. God meant us to feel this way, when he married us to each other."

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